

THE
INVESTIGATORS
in

THE CASE OF THE
POLTERGEIST





in

**THE CASE
OF THE
POLTERGEIST**

Weird things happen in Mrs Cartier's house: knocking and thumping sounds, furniture moves, cups fly through the air. This is a case to the taste of Jupiter, Pete and Bob! The initial enthusiasm of the detectives soon turns into fear and horror. Is it true that a poltergeist is up to mischief? Is Mrs Cartier's late husband trying to contact her? Is there a natural explanation for these phenomena? Even the otherwise cool Jupiter has doubts...

The Three Investigators
in
The Case of the Poltergeist

*Original German text by
André Marx*

*Based on characters created by
Robert Arthur*

Translated, adapted, and edited from:

Die drei ???: Poltergeist

(The Three ???: Poltergeist)

by

André Marx

(1997)

Cover art by

Aiga Rasch

(2019-12-18)

Contents

- 1. Thick Air**
- 2. Artistic Information**
- 3. Double Rebuff**
- 4. Aunt Elenor's Eyeball**
- 5. The Earthquake**
- 6. Too Many Cases Spoil the Detective**
- 7. Pete Freaks Out**
- 8. A Clear Case**
- 9. Poltergeists**
- 10. A Sleepless Night**
- 11. Solo Entries**
- 12. Trapped!**
- 13. Brain Cell Gymnastics**
- 14. A Flash of the Poltergeist**
- 15. Jupe Spots a Decisive Clue**
- 16. The Circle Closes**
- 17. An Old Acquaintance**
- 18. Aunt Elenor Sends Her Regards**

1. Thick Air

The phone rang.

Jupiter was sitting in the office of an old mobile home trailer and working on the computer. Some files had to be updated urgently, which had been badly neglected during the last holidays. The reports on their last cases had to be organized and entered into the computer.

Actually this was Bob's job, but he made himself very scarce lately and pushed off the work further and further. He hoped that Jupiter would eventually take care of it someday. Well, he wasn't wrong about that.

The phone rang again.

The First Investigator did not want to pick up the phone so that the answering machine would take over. But then he thought that maybe it could be Bob, who he would then immediately order to Headquarters and charge him with his responsibility.

After the third ring, Jupe's curiosity triumphed and he picked up the phone. "Jupiter Jones of the Three..." he began, but was sharply interrupted.

"Is Bob there?" asked an energetic woman's voice. Only a moment later did Jupiter recognize the voice of Elizabeth, Bob's girlfriend.

"... Investigators," Jupiter finished his sentence, reluctant to be interrupted. "No, he's not here, unfortunately. There's a lot of work waiting for him."

"Not only a lot of work," Elizabeth remarked angrily, "but also a friend who is now fed up. We were supposed to meet at the Art Gallery Hall—actually half an hour ago. If he shows up, tell him I'm going home now and he can reach me there!"

Jupe was about to reply, but Elizabeth had already hung up. Disapprovingly, he looked at the phone receiver. If Elizabeth was mad at Bob, she didn't have to take her anger out on him or all people. Even more irritated than before, he turned back to the computer screen, whose flickering information screamed for order. He took a look at Bob's handwritten notes next to the computer keyboard and tried to supplement the reports as much as possible. Meanwhile, he thought about how this kind of work always stuck with him. When there was a case to solve, his friends Pete and Bob, with whom he ran this detective agency, were always there. But for the work that followed, the two had the remarkable ability to make themselves invisible. Jupiter should have better things to do than to sit here in a stuffy trailer on this sunny day.

"Jupe!" Aunt Mathilda's voice echoed over the salvage yard and tearing him from his gloomy thoughts. Since his childhood Jupiter lived with his aunt Mathilda and his uncle Titus Jones, who owned and operated the Jones Salvage Yard. Originally it had been a just a junkyard, but over time the company had evolved into a respectable trade with antiques, collectibles, furniture and used everyday objects of all kinds that people from all over the area came to. The trailer that served The Three Investigators as the headquarters stood near the sales area.

"Yes," Jupiter shouted in a resentful manner and then rose to hear what his aunt wanted from him. He stepped outside.

"Uncle Titus asks you to help him unload the new goods."

"I'll be right there," grumbled Jupiter.

"Better go now," Aunt Mathilda suggested. "Uncle Titus must leave immediately."

Jupiter rolled his eyes, mumbled something incomprehensible and finally stepped out of the shadow of the trailer to follow his aunt. For the next half hour, he spent unloading old furniture from Uncle Titus's truck. He hardly spoke a word, although his uncle Titus, who was always in a good mood, tried several times to start a conversation.

When the work was done, his T-shirt was drenched in sweat and he returned to the trailer to wash up. His mood had worsened due to the physical exertion and he longed for something to vent his annoyance.

At that moment, a car roared through the courtyard driveway and slowed down. A door opened and then slammed shut again. Jupiter didn't have to look outside to know who it was. He recognized Pete's MG by the sound of the engine and also the steps approaching on the gravel road he clearly identified as Pete's sporty gait.

"Hello!" shouted Pete in a good mood as he entered Headquarters.

"Hmrrph," grunted Jupiter.

"Well, busy at work?" the tall boy asked and beamed at him, but Jupiter gave him a scowl.

"Yes, indeed. And unfortunately, I'm the only one here," Jupiter replied. "What could be the reason for that?"

"What's the matter with you?" Pete wanted to know, and he went around the answer. "Trouble?"

"This!" Jupe pointed accusingly to the computer as if it was to be blamed for his bad mood. "I'm in the process of updating our reports. But I can barely decipher Bob's notes written with his hoof. In addition, electricity and telephone bills for the last two months are long overdue. We urgently need to clean the printer and also get a new ink cartridge. The dishes pile up in the sink, which looks as if we could soon grow mushrooms in it. By the way, I have to help Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus with something every five minutes. After all, Uncle Titus generously allowed us to use this trailer for free, but expects us to help him at the yard from time to time. The emphasis is on 'us'. In fact, it looks like none of you are going to show up here when there is work. Instead, I get to do everything by myself. To come back to my question: What could be the reason for that?"

Jupe took a deep breath. It was clear to him that he had exaggerated some things, but that had simply been necessary to vent his anger. He felt better already.

"I am here after all," Pete replied and didn't know exactly whether he had wanted to sound meek or defensive. It was probably a mixture of both.

"Probably just for a moment, since you've just come from swimming training and is going to the tennis courts with Kelly," Jupiter suspected. He had noticed that Pete still had wet hair. And out of his backpack, which he had put on the ground, stuck a tennis racket.

Pete felt caught and blushed. He hoped Jupiter hadn't noticed under the dim lights in Headquarters. "Not quite," he admitted. "I just came from the tennis courts."

Jupiter corrected his thought that the wet hair probably came from the shower after the tennis game. "And what about that?" he asked aggressively and again pointed accusingly at the computer, and then added the entire trailer with a faltering gesture.

"If you want, I can stay and help you," Pete decided.

"Wonderful. Then why don't you go and do the dishes now?" Without another word, the First Investigator sat back at his desk and continued to hack at the keyboard. Also without a word Pete started to wash the dishes. He knew that Jupiter's outbursts of rage were often over

as quickly as they came. So he denied himself the biting remarks and hoped that the storm would soon be over.

The sound of another car coming to the yard interrupted their work. Even someone who didn't hear the car as often as the two of them would recognize this engine. It was Bob's old Beetle. A short time later, Bob and Elizabeth stood at the door of the trailer. Both looked very chic—Elizabeth wore a bright summer dress and Bob had squeezed himself into a cream jacket.

"So you found each other?" Jupiter asked briefly, without going into the unusual outfit of the two.

"Shortly after I called, Bob finally showed up," Elizabeth replied with a reproachful sideways glance at her boyfriend.

"We have some interesting news," Bob said.

"So do we," Jupiter replied. Actually his anger had almost gone, but he had wisely kept a little bit of it for Bob. He wasn't supposed to go away empty-handed.

Pete gave Bob a warning look. "Thick air," he murmured, so only Bob could hear it.

However, Bob was not deterred by that. "You have no idea what happened." He took a meaningful pause. He was about to give out his news when Elizabeth beat him to it.

"The Art Gallery Hall has been broken into," she blurted out. "Right in front of our eyes!"

2. Artistic Information

“Right in front of our eyes it might be a little exaggerated,” Bob confessed, after The Three Investigators had made themselves halfway comfortable in the narrow headquarters. Jupiter’s mood improved suddenly when he heard the news, and he decided to save his sermon for later.

Now Jupe wanted to hear the story of Bob and Elizabeth. Pete had stopped the washing and dried his hands, absent-mindedly, with a tea towel.

“Well, Elizabeth and I were supposed to meet at Rocky Beach Art Gallery Hall,” Bob started.

“Although Bob was late, though.” Elizabeth gave him played-up evil look.

“... which was because I still had a few important calls to make for Sax,” Bob defended himself. He often worked part-time for Sax Sendler’s music agency during school and holidays and was considered a versatile all-round employee.

“Anyway, there should be an event at the Art Gallery Hall today. My dad got an invitation to write an article about it in the *Los Angeles Times*. Ed Stingwood wanted to exhibit his paintings at the County Museum of Art in Los Angeles, but nothing came of it.”

Jupiter interrupted: “... because in the County Museum, or rather in one part of it, in the Robert O. Andersen Gallery, there was a water pipe burst and the humidity would have damaged the paintings.”

“Right,” Bob replied and nodded to Jupiter. “There is...”

“Hold on,” Pete interrupted him and temporarily paused to dry his hands, which had long since dried. “What are you talking about? County Museum? Water pipe burst? Who’s Ed Singwood?”

“Ed Stingwood...” Bob corrected him, “is currently one of the hippest artists. He’s from New York and recently caused a stir because one of his paintings was purchased at an auction by some businessman for a few hundred thousand dollars. Since then, his works have increased in value enormously and he is already being touted as the second Picasso.”

Pete nodded. “Well, well,” he said, little impressed. Art wasn’t exactly his thing. Bob was more interested in it. He could be found much more often at exhibitions than Jupe or Pete. However, his enthusiasm had waned since he worked for Sax Sendler and his new passion was music. “Then, what’s next?” Pete asked.

Bob continued: “There is currently an Ed Stingwood travelling exhibition, which means that his works will be shown in various cities. Actually, the exhibition should also come to Los Angeles, namely to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

“But only a few days ago there was this water pipe burst. They couldn’t find a suitable showroom so quickly in Los Angeles and our Rocky Beach museum was just renovated. I guess it’s pretty suitable, so the exhibition was moved here at short notice. Haven’t you read any of this? In the regional section of the local newspaper, there was a big article about it. After all it is a sensation that Rocky Beach becomes the focal point of artistic interest.”

“Good, good,” Pete said impatiently. “Go on!”

“Anyway, I had an invitation, well, actually my father had one. Since Rocky Beach is no longer under his department, he gave it to me and so we wanted to take part in the event

today,” Bob continued.

Elizabeth then took the floor: “I had already wondered why the guests had not yet entered the gallery. The opening was supposed to be at four o’clock and it was already half past five when Bob showed up, but the doors were still locked. Shortly afterwards someone announced that the event would have to be cancelled unfortunately because something was wrong with the lighting—a power failure or something. The event will be made up in the next few days, and the exact date will be published in the newspaper. Of course, people were all pretty upset. Some had travelled far to attend this exclusive event. There was some hustle and bustle, but the visitors gradually disappeared.”

“Oh, great. So what’s with the theft?” Pete asked demandingly.

“Coming soon,” Bob replied. “We stopped in front of the museum and talked. Two people came out of the gallery, a man and a young woman. The woman was in a state of complete disarray. We heard her say something about a theft, and that they had to call the police after all, and what a scandal it was that it happened here in Rocky Beach.”

“So you think that the blackout was just an excuse to cover up the fact that some paintings were stolen?” Jupiter asked. The computer work did not interested him anymore. The screen saver of colourful beads had flickered on the screen long ago.

“Exactly,” Bob replied and grinned proudly. “And we were fortunate enough to have heard about it before the police. What do you think? Shouldn’t we take this opportunity?” He looked at Jupiter and Pete provocatively.

“Hmm,” Pete pondered. “We don’t really have anything to do with this.” He wasn’t very excited about taking this case. He suspected that it would take so much time that school, his training and last but not least Kelly would suffer.

“At least we were there,” Elizabeth replied.

“Well, almost,” Pete mumbled, casting an uncertain look at Jupiter.

But the First Investigator already had this enterprising glitter in his eyes, which made Pete’s hopes fade. “I think Bob’s right. This is a good opportunity to investigate, as we’re almost the first to know about this theft.”

“A minute ago you said we had so much work,” Pete moaned. “Weren’t you going to organize the reports?”

“This can wait,” Jupiter replied curtly and rose.

“Wait a minute,” Pete said. “Since when is it decided so quickly? I think we need to come to an agreement first. In my opinion, we’ll keep our hands off it because, firstly, we have nothing to do with it, secondly, we have enough work to do, thirdly, we don’t even have a client, and fourthly, we could open the newspaper now and look for the next unsolved crime if we really want to have a new case.”

Elizabeth grinned defiantly at Pete. “That’s not quite true,” she said, rubbing her short, reddish hair. “You have a client—me! After all, I wanted to attend this event so badly. Since this has now failed, I give you the order to solve the case, so that the exhibition can proceed.”

Pete gave her a puzzled look as Bob and Jupe grinned to themselves.

“Come on, Pete,” Jupiter began conciliately. “I’m sure it won’t do any harm if we take a look around the place. It will become clear whether something will come of it.”

Bob was already at the door. “What are you waiting for? The sooner we get there, the better the chances of finding something out before the police do. Whose car are we taking?”

3. Double Rebuff

The Three Investigators were disappointed. When they and Elizabeth arrived on Pete's MG at the Art Gallery Hall, two police cars were already parked in front of the building. An officer was still sitting in the car, presumably talking to the station by radio. The others seemed to be already inside the building. The four of them approached the entrance.

"What do we do now?" Pete asked. "Should we just go in?"

"We'll look at the building from the outside first," Jupiter suggested. "Let's see if we can figure out where the thief got in." They went round the concrete building, which had been painted in friendly yellow and orange tones.

There were a few windows, but they were all barred. A steel door on the other side served as a back entrance.

"Hmm, it doesn't look very burglar-proof," Bob remarked. "The windows may be barred, but this door... I don't think it's particularly difficult for a pro to pick the lock."

"But there must be alarm systems here," Elizabeth thought. "It shouldn't be so easy for a burglar."

Jupiter raised an eyebrow doubtfully. "Do you think so? After all, this is not the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. There are certainly very good alarm systems, but we are here in Rocky Beach. Our art museum is actually not meant to exhibit such valuable paintings, so the security systems could be rather simple.

"In addition..." his gaze wandered upwards along the wall, "there are even more possibilities to break into a building—the flat roof up there, for example. There is probably a skylight or ventilation system that is not half as well secured as it should have been in this case."

"Is Chief Reynolds on this case? Maybe he's inside right now," Pete thought. "We should just ask. Maybe he can give us some information."

Chief Reynolds was their contact person at the local police, with whom they sometimes worked quite closely with. In some cases, The Three Investigators had provided him with important evidences or information about criminals. Reynolds was often pleased with the cooperation of the three detectives. In turn, he has helped them with their investigations.

The others agreed and they returned to the entrance. The officer in the car was still on the phone and The Three Investigators and Elizabeth managed to enter the building unnoticed. It was pleasantly cool in the entrance hall. A small cash desk stood next to the entrance, some brochures were displayed and a signpost on the wall showed the gallery's layout. Apart from that, the hall was rather simple—only a coat rack stood at the wall and here and there hung a painting, which was illuminated by a halogen spotlight hanging from the ceiling.

"The blackout was definitely a pretext," Elizabeth said. Still nobody was to be seen and the four entered a corridor, which should lead into the main exhibition area, according to gallery's layout. Here, were hung some modern paintings done by art students of a local college, as stated on the attached small signs. They heard voices from the room into which the passage led.

As they entered, they saw three policemen attending at the scene, and Bob recognized the man and young woman he had seen about an hour ago. He also noted that the policemen were

focused on a spot on the wall—a bald spot. Everywhere else hung pictures, the pictures of Ed Stingwood, as Bob quickly recognized. Only at that spot, the lamp from the ceiling shone on the white wall.

Suddenly a policeman noticed the unexpected visitors and approached them. He had a short military haircut and an unusually red face. “What are you doing here?” he asked sharply. “How did you get in here anyway?”

“Through the door,” Jupiter replied. “It was open and we were actually here for the exhibition. Where’s that gonna take place?”

Pete grinned at himself. Jupiter had an amazing acting talent, which he had always developed and refined since his time as a child star in a television programme. His role as an exhibition visitor was easily relieved by his self-evident appearance alone, although he only wore a T-shirt that were no longer fresh, short jeans and sneakers.

“Nowhere,” the man grumbled unkindly. “The exhibition has been rescheduled for an indefinite date.”

“And why, if I may ask,” Jupiter wanted to know.

“Check with the management of this gallery,” the policeman replied brusquely. “Would you please leave now? We have work to do.”

“These are the pictures of Ed Stingwood, aren’t they?” The First Investigator didn’t let up. “It looks like there’s one missing there. Perhaps it’s been stolen?”

“Please leave this building immediately. You are obstructing police work,” the officer said sharply.

“We don’t want to obstruct you, we want to help you—if you could tell us what happened...” Jupiter began again, but the officer interrupted him.

“... And how could you help me?”

“Very simple,” Jupiter replied. “We’re detectives. I am Jupiter Jones and these are my colleagues Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews. And Elizabeth Carroll,” he added, smiling briefly at the girl. “You can ask Chief Reynolds about us, he’ll tell you that we’ve been freelancers for Rocky Beach Police for some time.” Jupe had never complained about a lack of self-confidence.

The officer looked at him sharply. “I am Chief Reynolds,” he replied angrily and his red cheeks glowed. The Three Investigators looked at each other in astonishment. “At least on business,” the man added. “My name is Inspector Kershaw. I represent Reynolds as he is on vacation, and so his responsibilities are now mine. I don’t know anything about freelancers in the form of would-be detectives. Now please leave the building!”

“When is Chief Reynolds coming back?” Jupiter asked quickly.

“He only left the day before yesterday,” Kershaw replied. “Now get out of here!”

For a moment, the First Investigator couldn’t think of anything else and that moment was enough for Inspector Kershaw to push the four out of the room. He accompanied them out of the building, went back in and locked the door.

“That was fast,” Pete remarked as they stood in the warm afternoon sun again.

“You could say that,” grumbled Jupiter. “It’s very annoying Reynolds isn’t here. I’m sure he would have given us some information. Now we have to get them in another way.”

“You want to keep going?” Bob blinked at Jupiter in bright sunlight.

“Why not?” insisted Jupiter.

“Well, because Pete’s actually right,” Bob continued. “We have nothing to do with this case. It was worth a try to have a look around, but we have just been rebuffed. So what are we supposed to do?”

Elizabeth looked at her friend in disbelief. “And what about me?” she asked demanding. “After all, I am your client. Are you telling me you’re not in the mood to take my case?”

“Client’s good,” joked Pete. “Jupe just made you an honorary member. My colleague Elizabeth Carroll,” he imitated the tone of Jupiter and laughed. “I guess you’re the fourth investigator now.”

“I’ll waive my honorary title and become a client again. So get to work,” Elizabeth snapped.

“Funny,” Bob murmured. “Normally, you always complain about me having so little time. And now you’re insisting that we take on a new case?” Elizabeth didn’t respond, but just smiled at Bob.

“I think we should give ourselves another chance,” Jupe took over. “I’ve already thought about something. Imagine, the theft of pictures was not an opportunity, but a planned thing—and so precisely planned that the water pipe burst at the County Museum was not a coincidence, but was staged to prevent the exhibition from taking place in a well-guarded museum.”

“Not a bad thought,” Bob agreed. “So you’re saying we should go to L.A. to look around the County Museum?”

Jupiter nodded. “Exactly.” Then he noticed Pete looking stealthily at his wristwatch. “You will certainly be able to catch up on the training, Pete,” he guessed Pete’s thoughts and grinned.

Pete switched quickly: “Who is talking about training? I’m just worried about all the work piling up at Headquarters. “It has to be done, too.” He grinned triumphantly back.

Pete dropped Elizabeth off at home, as she still had work to do for school. Then he went to Los Angeles with Bob and Jupiter. The traffic here was catastrophic as usual. The Three Investigators soon regretted that they had left right away instead of waiting for the weekend. Because in the late afternoon they got into the full rush hour. In Los Angeles there was only a short subway line and so most citizens preferred to take their own car despite the smog hovering constantly over the metropolis. The heat was oppressive.

“If this continues, we won’t be able to get to the museum before it closes,” Pete moaned as they were once again waiting at a traffic light. “Maybe it wasn’t such a good idea after all.”

Jupiter almost agreed, but then said nothing. He was the one that made the proposal.

“Oh, we’ll be fine,” Bob said in a good mood in the passenger seat. “I could still be angry about this Inspector Kershaw. Such a pompous idiot. What is he actually thinking. He could have at least told us something! Well, but what can you expect from someone named Kershaw,” he added, earning a rib poke from Pete.

“He’s only human,” Jupiter mumbled absent-mindedly.

Pete turned into Wilshire Boulevard and shortly afterwards looked for a parking space at the corner of Hancock Park. A look at his watch told him that they didn’t have much time left. “Might just be enough,” he murmured and got out of the car. They entered the museum building and paid at the cash desk.

“So, where was this burst water pipe now?” Pete asked, wondering why the museum could be visited normally despite the incident.

“It was only in one wing of the museum,” Jupiter explained. “Of all places, in the Robert O. Andersen Gallery, where contemporary art is exhibited. That’s why I don’t believe in coincidences. Anderson was, by the way...”

“Spare us that!” Pete interrupted him. “I don’t think it’s important to our investigation to know who Robert O. Anderson was or is.”

Surprisingly, Jupe did not continue with his explanations this time, because he had seen the directional sign to the gallery and was now heading straight for it.

They crossed part of the museum without paying any attention to the works of art exhibited. Bob would have liked to look around, but there were not enough time. The access to the gallery was blocked by a rope, with a sign saying: ‘Exhibition Closed’. Nearby was an attendant in uniform. The Three Investigators approached the woman.

“Excuse me,” began Jupiter. “We’d like to go to the Robert O. Anderson Gallery.”

“I’m sorry, it’s closed at the moment.”

“We know that,” Jupiter continued. “We heard about the water pipe burst. But we would still like to have a look at the damage, as we are currently working on a project at school to investigate damage to buildings caused by external factors. Would it perhaps be possible to take a look inside?”

“Well, I don’t know,” the woman replied hesitantly. “There are already repairers inside to fix the damage.”

“We certainly won’t disturb them in their work,” Bob intervened and put on his most likeable smile.

“Actually, visitors are not allowed in.”

“But we’re not visitors,” Pete explained. “At least not in the conventional sense. We’re kind of... here for an assignment, so to speak.” Pete noted with satisfaction that this assertion was not even a lie.

The attendant was still thinking when a man approached them. Pete only noticed him out of the corner of his eye, and he turned around. “Oh, no,” he muttered softly.

“What are you doing here?” Inspector Kershaw asked harshly as he saw the three of them.

“Inspector!” Jupiter exclaimed in delight. “Nice to see you again so soon. We’re here for a school assignment.”

“Yes,” the warden interfered eagerly. “These three young men are working on a project and want to look at the water damage. Perhaps you could take them with you, Inspector.” Apparently her doubts were suddenly swept away.

Kershaw turned to them. “I don’t know why you think there’s anything interesting to see there,” he said forcefully and his red face became even redder, “but you’d better keep your hands off it. I don’t want to see you again.”

The heat had hardly subsided when they were on their way back to Rocky Beach.

“That’s not what it was supposed to be,” Bob buzzed. His good mood had left him by now. “What do we do now?”

“Stop it,” Pete said quickly. “Jupe himself said we’d give ourselves another chance. We did, but apparently the police aren’t as stupid as we sometimes think they are. This Kershaw probably had the same thought as us. So I don’t want to get in the way of that guy.”

“Pete’s right,” agreed Jupiter, who had made himself comfortable in the back seat. “It was worth a try, but apparently they won’t let us investigate. It’s a pity, it is what it is, so we don’t have a new case. It’s not that bad, there’s enough work waiting for us anyway.” He kept quiet but was still thinking about what just happened. Actually, everything had gone wrong. “This is one of those days you can confidently erase from your memory,” he sighed.

4. Aunt Elenor's Eyeball

Two days later, The Three Investigators learned about the burglary at the museum. The press had gotten wind of it and the *California News* reported about it in detail. In fact, only one painting had been stolen during the burglary and this was considered to be the artist's masterpiece: an oil painting called the Green Iron Woman.

"As I had guessed, the thief knew exactly what he wanted," Jupiter said as he sat with Bob at Headquarters. Bob had just come from Sax Sendler and had brought the newspaper with him. "I am more and more convinced that the water pipe burst was no coincidence, but part of a carefully devised plan," Jupiter added.

Bob twisted his eyes. "I wish I hadn't shown you that article," he said. "You're absorbing every piece of information they throw at you. I thought we wanted to put the case to rest."

"This doesn't mean that I am not allowed to be mentally active," Jupiter found and studied the newspaper article again.

"What now?" Bob wanted to know. "I was supposed to come here to update the files."

"Please," Jupiter mumbled absent-mindedly, as he was still absorbed in the newspaper report. "Go ahead."

Bob sighed so loud, Jupiter looked up. "What is it?"

"You're sitting on the desk chair."

"Oh." Jupe cleared the place for Bob.

Bob turned on the computer. At that moment the door to the trailer opened and Pete, Kelly and Elizabeth came in with a gush of fresh air. Kelly was with Elizabeth when she met Pete. They had decided to stop by Headquarters for a while.

"There you are," Bob said and turned off the computer.

"Hey!" protested Jupiter. "Are you trying to avoid work again?"

"Never!" Bob said. "But didn't you say something earlier about a cherry pie that your aunt Mathilda has for us? We should eat it while it's still..." Bob could not think of anything about a cherry pie, "... uh... as long as the sun is still shining."

"The sun will shine all day long, Bob," Jupe replied.

"Who knows," Bob said, got up and left the trailer.

Aunt Mathilda's cherry pie was, as always, first class. The five of them sat on the porch and enjoyed it.

Jupe regretted that his girlfriend Lys couldn't be there. Lys de Kerk was a young actress who had met The Three Investigators, particularly Jupe, once on a case. In the meantime, she went to college to work her way for a second profession in addition to acting. Lys already had her own little apartment.

She didn't have time today because she had to study for an exam. Jupe imagined how she was sweating over her books alone at home now, while they sat here comfortably in the sun, enjoying Aunt Mathilda's cherry pie.

"I have news for you, by the way," Kelly interrupted.

"About the burglary?" Jupiter asked immediately.

"No, not about the burglary. I have a new case for you."

“Hey!” Elizabeth interrupted her. “What do you mean? They already have a case. I’m their client.”

“I’m sorry, Elizabeth,” Bob said. “We’ve abandoned that case. This Inspector Kershaw got in our way twice and was not interested in working with us. And in that case, his cooperation would have been necessary.”

“And what about the exhibition?” Elizabeth asked.

“It’s happening. The paper says it’ll be back next week. Without the Green Iron Woman, anyway,” Bob replied.

“Without who?” Elizabeth asked in amazement. Bob explained to her.

“All right,” she relented. “If the exhibition takes place, I can then fire you.”

“Well, Kelly, what have you got for us?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“Well,” she began hesitantly, “it may not be as spectacular as a stolen painting, but at least something has disappeared. An amulet. It belongs to my great-aunt Elenor and she’s been missing it for a few days. On the weekend we had a big family party and Aunt Elenor was there. I don’t really know her at all, she’s one of those relatives who can only be seen once a while at special family birthday gatherings. She mentioned that her ancient family heirloom, a valuable amulet, was lost. I told her that that I know a few detectives, and she asked me to ask you if you would like to help her find the amulet. Actually, I pushed it aside, but she called me today to ask if you were interested.”

“Hmm,” thought Jupiter. “A missing amulet is actually not very exciting.” He pulled a face and looked around. Pete and Bob didn’t look too enthusiastic either.

“I thought it was a little consolation to the museum case,” Kelly continued. “And besides, your motto is, ‘We Investigate Anything’. Well, you can’t really avoid this, can’t you.”

Jupiter’s facial expression darkened a little more. “I’ve never thought of it that way, though. Where does your great-aunt live?”

“In Malibu. She has her own house on the coast,” Kelly replied.

“And her funny family heirloom is really so important to her that she wants to hire detectives?” Bob asked.

Kelly nodded and smiled as if she wanted to apologize for having such a great-aunt.

“Well, then, I guess we’ll have to go with it,” Bob said.

“I told her you might even be able to come by this afternoon.” Again she smiled embarrassedly.

Surprisingly, Bob was on her side. “All right, let’s go there later,” he said cheerfully.

Jupiter gave him a gloomy look. “All you want to do is avoid work.”

Bob grinned. “Why would you think that? I’m just following our motto, ‘We Investigate Anything’.”

Elenor Madigan’s house was way too big for one person. Kelly had told them that Aunt Elenor was unmarried and living alone. Her house was located in a row of other large private houses directly on the road that ran along the rocky coast of Malibu.

The Three Investigators sat in Pete’s car and looked at the building from the outside. “Kelly already told me a lot about her great-aunt,” Pete reported. “She seems a little... odd. Supposedly she collects all kinds of junk and has a funny taste in things. So you mustn’t be surprised at anything.”

They got out of the car and entered the front garden, which was very well-kept, but full of curiosities. A bird house that looked like a Chinese temple stood directly next to a stone figure about one metre tall that turned out to be a garden gnome. The three detectives had

often seen such strange figures on their trip to Europe, but never expected to find them in California.

"Is this modern now?" Bob asked.

"Something different," Pete found. "But what's that garbage heap back there? Did Aunt Elenor sweep it out?" He pointed to a stack of rusted metal that seemed strangely out of place on the freshly-mowed lawn.

Jupiter laughed. "It's a sculpture," he explained. "Aunt Elenor really has a fancy taste. But now pull yourselves together. We have to be serious. Or do you want to embarrass Kelly, Pete?"

Pete bit his lips and then lowered his gaze while lifting an eyebrow. Now he looked like an English butler. "I am serious," he said with a nasal voice and an unmoving expression, but could not resist the laughter.

Jupiter wanted to give him a reproachful look, but he also had to grin. Finally he forced himself to be serious and walked up the two steps to the door.

He took a look at the doorbell shield, then he rang. A melodic gong, which did not want to stop at all, sounded inside the house. The Three Investigators recognized the famous melody of Big Ben in London. Even before the chimes were over, the door opened and a fat woman of about sixty appeared. She wore a glittering house dress patterned with bright red tones, had shiny black hair and wore thick make-up. The loud and shrill voice with which she spoke matched her appearance.

"Oh, excuse me, this door bell is always so loud and lasts a long time." The melody just faded away with its last note. "Ha, you see, It's already quiet." She beamed at the three of them.

"You must be those detectives Kelly recommended to me, right?"

"Right, Mrs Madigan..." Jupiter began.

"Oh, Miss Madigan, please," Kelly's great-aunt interrupted him.

"Excuse me." Jupiter handed her one of the business cards he always carried with him. It said:



"Let me guess," Elenor Madigan suggested. "You're certainly Jupiter Jones," she said, pointing to Jupiter. He nodded. "Then you must be Bob," she went on and stretched out her finger to Pete, "and you must be Pete of my little Kelly." She smiled at Bob.

Bob had to pull himself together hard not to let go. So at that moment he quickly concentrated on something completely different. He was thinking about his mother's pancake recipe when he said, "No, I'm Bob."

"Oh!" Miss Madigan shouted and clapped her hands. "Oh, well, that happens. Come in and have a cup of tea with me, and I'll tell you everything."

She led the three into the living room. On the way there, there was already a lot to see. Directly behind the entrance door was a wooden African mask of gigantic dimensions

sporting a demonic gaze aimed at the door, the inside of which was painted in a screaming yellow. From the small corridor they went into the entrance hall, which was crammed with various things. Other masks, pictures, dolls, statues and sculptures hung, stood or laid around everywhere. But nothing seemed to fit together very well—African masks alternated with Egyptian tapestries, Greek statues stood under German cuckoo clocks. Modern and old-fashioned artefacts were densely packed. The entrance hall looked more like Uncle Titus's storeroom than an occupied house.

"The Green Iron Woman!" Bob shouted in astonishment, pointing to a large framed picture hanging on a wall between a Chinese fan and a mirror with a golden ornate frame.

Pete, who didn't immediately know what Bob was talking about, turned to face him in confusion. "What kind of woman?" he asked.

But Miss Madigan beat him to it. "Ah, an art connoisseur. Very nice. I'm sure you've heard of this tragedy that's happened. The greatest work of Ed Stingwood is lost forever." She stretched the word tragedy endlessly.

Now Pete understood. The Green Iron Woman? That's that picture?"

"A reproduction of it, yes," explained Elenor Madigan. "There was a limited edition print of the masterpiece and I was fortunate enough to purchase one of a thousand copies. Now that the original is stolen, the print may become really valuable."

Pete looked at the picture. It was a wild smear of light grey and mint green tones. Here and there the painter seemed to have crossed out the picture with a brush, but Pete assumed that the wide stripes of colour belonged to it. In the chaotic forms he managed to make out objects with some imagination. He thought he recognized a house and an arch there could be the back of a horse. But nowhere in the picture did he discover a green iron woman—whatever that was. But he preferred to keep his thoughts to himself.

They continued on into the living room, which had a wide window front facing the Pacific. There was similar chaos in this room. Here, too, it looked as if an insane interior decorator and designer had really let off steam once, none of the pieces of furniture matched the other. In one corner stood an old secretary table made of richly-decorated walnut wood, and right next to it an ultra-modern shelf made of steel and glass.

Elenor Madigan asked The Three Investigators to sit down. She fetched the tea and when she sat down with the three, she showed them a photo of the amulet. Then she began her story. "This amulet is an ancient heirloom of my family. My great-grandmother got it as an engagement gift from her husband and since then it has passed down from generation to generation. I have always treasured it like my eyeball. It has always been the most important piece in my collection." She made a generous gesture that circled the entire room—the mess that she apparently called a collection. "And now it's gone." With another exaggerated gesture, she supported this sentence and dejectedly massaged her temples with her thumb and middle finger.

"What do you mean it's gone? Do you think it was stolen?" Jupiter wanted to know.

"Stolen?" Kelly's aunt looked up. "Heavens forbid, no! No, it certainly hasn't been stolen. It's... lost! I had always kept it in my jewellery box and one day it was gone. I must have misplaced it, I don't know. Oh, I must have misplaced it, I don't know. Oh, I'm a little distracted sometimes. You know, this big house and my collection, all this needs so much attention and care. It can happen that I put something in the wrong place."

Jupiter nodded. "And we should look for the amulet?"

"I've searched for it myself. I turned the whole house upside down, but without success." Again she sighed heavily and touched her heart as if she was suffering from physical pain due

to the loss of her heirloom. "But you're detectives. I'm sure you can find where my eyeball is."

Pete frowned. "We can't do more than search either," he said, earning an inconspicuous kick from Bob.

"I'm sure you can do it. Kelly has been raving about you guys. She said if anyone could find the amulet, it would be Jupiter, Pete and Rob."

"Bob," Bob said.

"Oh, yes, forgive me." Miss Madigan smiled at Bob.

Although everything was seemingly clear, she continued her story. She told of her family, of her collection and again and again of her 'eyeball' and how much the loss hurt her. It took quite a while until Jupiter managed to politely interrupt the monologue to tell her that they had to leave now.

"Oh yes, I understand that, of course. Oh, but I'm also a chatterbox." She laughed quietly and clapped her hands again. Then she escorted the three to the door.

"By the way, who's Ethan Easton?" Jupiter wanted to know when they were already outside.

"How do you know about Mr Easton?" Miss Madigan asked in surprise.

"The name is under yours on the doorbell sign," said Jupiter, pointing to the small brass plaque under the bell button.

"Oh yes, of course. That's my lodger," Miss Madigan replied. "He lives in a room on the upper floor." She paused a while.

"Oh, regarding my amulet, what have you decided now?" she asked hopefully. "Will you accept the assignment?"

"We need to discuss that," Jupiter replied, reaching out his hand to Elenor Madigan. "We'll get back to you."

"Oh yes, please!" she almost begged. "I just have to get the amulet back!"

They said goodbye and The Three Investigators quickly got into the car.

"My goodness!" moaned Pete. "A woman like an earthquake! I've never seen anyone say 'Oh' so often and sigh all the time."

"Don't let Kelly hear that," Bob was smirking. "Or else you might annoy her whole family."

"I don't know," Jupiter said. "I didn't think she was that bad. She is a bit headstrong, that's true, but all in all she seems to be quite likeable. I think she'd really appreciate it if we could help her. And it shouldn't be a problem for us to find that amulet."

Jupiter didn't know how wrong he was yet.

5. The Earthquake

“I immediately said it wasn’t a good idea,” hissed Pete as he and Jupe rolled up the heavy carpet that was in Miss Madigan’s bedroom. “I feel like a cleaner! What does this have to do with detective work?” he whispered because Aunt Elenor could show up at any moment.

“Calm down,” Jupiter hissed back. “We have accepted the mission, now we must carry it out!”

“I was against it!” Pete whispered angrily. Now they had rolled up the carpet completely. “No amulet here,” the Second Investigator said and they rolled the carpet back again.

The evening before at their headquarters, the three had decided to help Kelly’s great-aunt, even though they were aware that this was not going to be a very exciting case. But after a lengthy lecture by Jupiter about their motto and the obligations it entailed, which they could not simply ignore, they agreed to look for the amulet. If Jupiter was honest, he didn’t feel like it either. But as the leader, he felt responsible for the morale of their company and he didn’t think it was fair to decline a job just because they felt it was boring. Miss Madigan was a client like everyone else, so there was no reason not to take the case. At least that’s what Jupiter had believed the day before and had convinced the others, even though Pete in particular had been very reluctant at first. Meanwhile Jupiter had to admit that he was no longer convinced of his decision.

“Oh, be careful with that,” warned Elenor Madigan, who had suddenly appeared at the door behind them. “This is a very precious carpet! Well, even if it may not look very valuable, for me it has personal value, so to speak. I brought it back from a trip to Asia. Imagine I bought it from a Turkish carpet dealer who wanted to sell it to me at a horrendous price, but I...”

Pete switched his ears off to avoid hearing this extremely exciting story. He stood up and turned to one of the pictures hanging on the wall. It was a silk-painted depiction of a dove, clearly too cheesy for Pete’s taste, and he only hoped that Kelly’s great-aunt would tell him about the story of this piece from her ‘collection’.

He just took the frame off the wall when Miss Madigan yelled out loud. With a shock Pete almost dropped the picture.

“No! Not the pictures, for heaven’s sake, not the pictures,” she screamed.

Pete turned around in amazement. “But...” he began.

“If one of the frames was damaged, I couldn’t take it,” she shouted, holding her ringed hands to her cheeks. “I got most of the picture frames from Europe, where I bought them from a gallery in Ireland that had to close. They have a very special value to me!”

“But,” Pete reinstated, “we’re supposed to search the whole house.”

“Not the pictures!” repeated Miss Madigan. “And besides, young man, do you think I’d hide my amulet behind a picture?”

Pete would have liked to reply that he would believe that she was capable of doing that. But he bit off the remark and instead put the picture back in its place. Then he sat down on his knees to look under the bed. Often people would hide something under the mattresses, but he preferred not to lift them until Miss Madigan had left the room. She’d probably scream out loud again if he even touched the duvet cover.

She stayed at the door for quite a while and Pete pretended to be madly busy under the bed. When she finally left the room, he crawled out from underneath. "Not the pictures! And not the carpets either, and probably not the bed," he hissed angrily. "Jeez, I didn't recall her telling us not to touch the pictures. What do you think she'll say when we start searching her closets?"

"She cares a lot about her collection," Jupiter tried to reassure him. "You have to understand that. We'll just search the closets when she's not around." In reality, he saw things the same way Pete did, but of course he couldn't admit that. After all, he was the one who had persuaded the other two to take the case.

"The annoying thing is that she keeps appearing out of nowhere," Pete replied, frowned at the bedspread and lifted the mattress.

Bob didn't feel much better. While Jupe and Pete looked in the bedroom on the top floor, he stayed in the living room they were at during their first visit. When Miss Madigan had left the bedroom, she had gone straight to him. Bob was just about to look behind a cupboard with a flashlight.

"That's not necessary," said Miss Madigan. "I've already looked there."

"Did you move this cupboard away from the wall? You can hardly see anything," Bob said. Before Elenor Madigan could reply, Bob grabbed the cupboard firmly to pull it aside.

"Stop!" Aunt Elenor shouted hysterically. "That's a valuable cupboard! I wouldn't survive the slightest scratch!"

Bob smiled bravely at her. "But maybe your amulet was lying on the cupboard and slipped behind it. I can't see much with the flashlight, so it would make sense to move it a little to the side. I promise you, I will be very careful."

Elenor Madigan looked at Bob desperately. "No," she decided then. "No, no, that won't be necessary. I'm sure I didn't put the amulet on the cupboard. I never put anything on the cupboard. No, no, there's definitely nothing behind it."

"Whatever you say," Bob replied and left the cupboard to turn to one of the small sculptures standing at the window. One was a tiger made of plaster. Bob suspected that the base was hollow, so you could hide something under it. He reached for the tiger, but Miss Madigan intervened again.

"Oh, just be careful! That piece is very, very fragile! Well, it really doesn't work that way, Rob."

"Bob," Bob said.

"Excuse me. What was I gonna say? Oh, yeah, right, that's really not how it goes. Those are valuable pieces from my collection and you and your colleagues, you deal with them as if they did not matter."

"But, Miss Madigan," Bob tried cautiously, "we have to search somewhere."

"But not in such impossible places!" Miss Madigan said. "Do you believe I hid my eyeball under my Indian tiger? That's absurd."

Now Bob got a little angry and it was hard for him to hide it. "We don't believe anything," he replied coolly.

"The fact is you misplaced the amulet and can't find it. Therefore, we must consider the most impossible places. My father found his car keys in his slippers once before." He turned around and lifted the tiger up despite Miss Madigan's objection. He heard her draw in her breath sharply and then hold it. There was nothing under the plaster figure. Carefully he put it back again and continued searching, Elenor Madigan's stabbing gaze was always behind his back.

As Jupiter was examining the heater in the entrance hall, the front door opened and a tall, lanky man with dark, short hair came in. He looked down in amazement at Jupiter squatting on the floor. "What are you doing here?" he wanted to know. "Who are you anyway?"

"My name is Jupiter Jones. I'm searching the house on behalf of Miss Madigan. You must be Mr Easton."

"Right," the man replied, somewhat confused. "Ethan Easton. Why are you searching the house?"

"My colleagues and I want to find Miss Madigan's missing amulet," Jupiter said.

"Ah yes. She told me about it. And now she has amulet sniffers?" he laughed.

"Detectives," Jupiter replied curtly as he continued to inspect the individual ribs of the heater with the flashlight. He handed Mr Easton one of their business cards.

The man accepted them with interest. "And you're looking at the whole house?" he asked. "Even the heater?"

Jupe shrugged his shoulders. "We don't have a concrete clue, so we have to try everywhere. Miss Madigan may have misplaced her amulet, or she may have lost it, so it may reappear in the most impossible places."

"As long as you exclude my room, it shall be all right with me," Mr Easton replied, a bit too harsh, Jupiter thought. "That's where you shouldn't be." He went to the stairs and up to the first floor.

"That was almost an invitation," remarked Pete, who appeared after he had heard the short conversation from the next room. "If someone tells me that I have no business in his room, that usually means the opposite."

"You mean Mr Easton stole the amulet?" asked Jupiter quietly, not wanting Miss Madigan to hear.

"It's possible," said Pete.

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. "Why would he do that?" he said. "I mean, why the amulet of all things? We've seen Aunt Elenor's jewellery box, and there are far more valuable pieces than a small gold-plated amulet."

"Maybe there was something hidden in it," Pete suspected.

But Jupiter just grinned. "Yes, maybe."

There were infinite nooks and crannies in Elenor Madigan's house and The Three Investigators were busy searching all afternoon. In the evening, they were far from finished. Elenor Madigan kept getting in their way and they actually started searching the closets and drawers secretly when she had just left the room. During all this time she was constantly upset about the approach of The Three Investigators and soon killed their last nerve. Jupiter decided to talk to her about it that night.

When they finally sat together in the living room drinking a cup of tea, he wanted to give it up, but Miss Madigan beat him to it. "Well, I'm really grateful to you for helping me look for it. But sometimes I really think you don't quite understand what it is all about."

Jupiter raised an eyebrow. "So?" he asked. "What's it all about?"

"Well, you're supposed to find the amulet," she whispered, "but instead, you're looking between the heater ribs and under the bed."

"But we must start somewhere, Miss Madigan," Jupiter tried to be friendly.

"But not in those absurd places," she replied and looked at him indignantly.

"Where else then?" Pete wanted to know. He didn't try to be friendly anymore.

"How should I know? You're the detective!" she shouted.

“Right.” Bob tried to save the situation. “We’re the detectives. And actually, the first thing we need to do is check out the closets and drawers. Those are the most obvious places to look for your amulet.”

“No, that’s out of the question,” Miss Madigan said, piqued. “I’ve already searched all the closets and drawers, so you keep your hands off them!”

Now they were back at the beginning of their discussion. So Jupiter tried it from a different angle: “Are you really sure that the amulet is still here in the house? Maybe you wore it somewhere and lost it or left it lying around.”

“No, no, certainly not. I never left the house with that amulet!” Miss Madigan assured them.

“Then I have one question regarding Mr Easton. Is it possible that he has something to do with the disappearance?” Jupiter deliberately expressed himself cautiously, for he had noticed that a conversation with Aunt Elenor was like a minefield: one wrong word, and a bomb could go off. Or as Pete described her—‘a woman like an earthquake’.

“What do you mean, Jupiter?” she asked, a little confused.

Now he had to put his cards on the table: “I mean, he might have taken the amulet.”

Elenor Madigan opened her eyes and inhaled sharply. “Jupiter!” she exclaimed indignantly. “... How can you even think about that?”

“A good detective must consider every possibility,” he replied coolly. “And I don’t know Mr Easton, so I can’t judge whether he’s an honourable man.”

“But he certainly is,” Miss Madigan assured them, still a little shocked at Jupiter’s suspicions. “For Mr Easton, I’d lay my hand on the fire that he’d never steal from me.” She leaned forward in disdain and continued on a little quieter: “Or do you think that I would have taken him as a lodger in my house?”

The very fact that Mr Easton lived in Miss Madigan’s house seemed to make him beyond reproach. Jupiter sighed, because he couldn’t think of a suitable answer to that.

“Of course not, Miss Madigan,” he finally said, resigned.

“So what now?” she wanted to know. “Will you find the amulet?”

“We’ll do our best,” Jupe replied. “Provided you give us a free hand in our search.”

“But you do have a free hand!” she replied. “You can search however and wherever you want. Just not in my closets!” She stretched her index finger into the air like a teacher and smiled at the three detectives.

And not everywhere else either, Jupe thought. “Thank you, Miss Madigan,” he said, trying to smile back as kindly as possible.

Then The Three Investigators left the house as fast as they could.

6. Too Many Cases Spoil the Detective

The next day was just as unpleasant. Right after school, The Three Investigators set off again for Malibu, this time much more listless than the day before.

They spent the whole afternoon in Miss Madigan's house, continuing to turn it upside down and were not spared the hysteria of the lady of the house this time either. Especially Pete. She really got on his nerves and when they drove back to Rocky Beach in his car in the early evening, he vented his anger.

"Well, let's face it," he started it. "Shall we really keep doing this?"

"What?" Bob asked.

"Should we really let Aunt Elenor treat us like idiots? Should we really waste our time looking for a funny amulet who first of all is probably not even worth anything, and secondly was probably thrown out by her as trash?" They had been calling Miss Madigan Aunt Elenor in her absence.

"She's the great aunt of your friend Kelly after all," Bob threw in with a grin. "To keep peace in the family, you shouldn't talk about her like that. Who knows, maybe someday she'll be your great-aunt, too."

Pete made a grimace. "What does that have to do with it? I just don't feel like crawling around on the floor anymore and letting myself be accused of doing everything wrong because I accidentally touched a picture."

He made a horrified face and disguised his voice imitating Miss Madigan: "Not the pictures!"

Pete continued after a pause: "But seriously, this is probably the worst case we've ever had. I almost refuse to call this silly search a case. Normally we don't charge a fee, but in that case I'd think twice about it."

"But we have an obligation," Jupiter threw in from the back seat. "We can't just throw everything away."

"Why not?" Pete snapped. "Why can't we just throw it away? I admit we've never done this before, but eventually there's always the first time."

"We have an obligation," Jupiter repeated. "We must not be unfaithful to our motto. And we have a client who relies on us and trusts us."

"That's not exactly what she's doing!" Pete got excited. "She doesn't trust us that much." With the thumb and index finger of his right hand he indicated how far he thought the trust of Elenor Madigan went. "Otherwise, she'd let us do our work without interfering all the time."

Again he imitated Miss Madigan's voice: "No! Oh, no! Please don't! Don't touch that! And neither can you, and how dare you! Oh my gosh!"

"I admit it's a bit exhausting," Jupiter tried to give in.

"A bit? Come on, Juve, you're as frustrated and angry as I am. But since you're the leader, of course you can't expose your feelings. Deep down inside, you would rather relinquish the case now than later, even if it were a hundred times against our principles," Pete said.

Jupiter remained silent, which was enough for Pete's answer. "The First Investigator is speechless. I therefore believe that we should vote. Who's in favour of turning Aunt Elenor's

apartment upside down?"

Jupiter raised his hand.

"And who's in favour of dropping the case?" Pete, who had asked the question, steered for a few seconds only with one hand and held up the other hand. "What about you, Bob? Now it's up to you."

After a pause, Bob replied: "I don't want to be the scapegoat, so I abstain. You two decide."

"But you'll have an opinion on this, don't you?" Pete demanded.

"I... I am undecided," Bob replied and then kept quiet.

Pete drove into the Jones Salvage Yard and parked his car. Jupe opened the door and got out.

"What's it gonna be?" Pete wanted to know. "I want this cleared up tonight so I don't have to dream about weird sculptures and ugly carpets."

"Then come in with me," Jupiter suggested, and the two followed him to Headquarters. Inside, Bob first opened the small fridge and drank a sip of Coke.

"Well? Are we going to go on or not?" Pete asked. "Say something, Rob." He laughed and boxed Bob on the shoulder, but Bob didn't think it was funny.

"I told you I'd stay out of it," he replied.

"You're always so terribly diplomatic," Pete sighed.

Jupiter had sat at his desk in the meantime. The red light on the phone answering machine showed that they had a message. He rewound it and played it back. For a moment, the other two stopped their conversation.

First came Jupiter's announcement, then an older woman's voice came: "How do you do? My name is Lydia Cartier. An old client of yours gave me your phone number. I have a case for you. It's a little difficult to say it on the answering machine. I'm having problems in my house. I... uh... I can just say now that I have... unwanted residents, so to speak. Please call me if you're interested." She gave her number, then it beeped and followed by silence.

"Aha," Jupiter said. "Interesting. Another case."

"It's not often we get an assignment by phone." Bob looked at his watch. "It's not too late yet. Are you calling?"

"Should I?" Jupiter asked hypocritically.

"Remember our motto," Pete teased him. "We'll take any case. We should at least listen to what this Mrs Cartier has to say."

The First Investigator shrugged. "You're right." He dialled the number given. While it was ringing on the line, he switched to loudspeakers so that Pete and Bob could hear the conversation.

"Hello?" the voice came out of the speaker.

"Good evening, this is Jupiter Jones from The Three Investigators. You called us earlier."

"Yes, that's right. Thank you so much for calling back today, Jupiter. I don't know what to do anymore, so I had to call you, although I feel a little uncomfortable."

"What's this all about?" Jupiter wanted to know.

"That's difficult to say. I hope you and your colleagues don't think I am crazy. My house is haunted."

"It's haunted?" asked Jupiter. He turned to his friends and raised his eyebrows.

"Yes, it's haunted. I'm really uncomfortable saying that. You must think I'm crazy, but that's the way it is."

"What exactly is happening?"

“Well, sometimes I hear a knocking sound. There’s knocking all over the house, here and there. Then I suddenly realize that pieces of furniture have moved, and sometimes I even see something moving right in front of my eyes as if by magic.”

Jupiter still had his eyebrows up. “That is indeed... remarkable.”

“You have to believe me. Can you help me?”

“Hard to say,” Jupiter replied. “We’d have to take a look around the place.” Again he turned to the other two during the conversation and Bob and Pete nodded enthusiastically.

“Yes, please, that would be very kind of you. Could you come by as soon as possible? Maybe tomorrow? This haunt is slowly robbing me of my mind.”

“Tomorrow?” Jupe murmured. “Unfortunately, we are currently working on a case, Mrs Cartier. We’ll have to agree first and get back to you.”

“Yes, I can understand that. Is this a very important case? I... I really need your help. I don’t know what to do anymore.” The voice, which sounded very calm at first, now became fragile and The Three Investigators could hear the woman’s self-control slowly crumbling. “I’m willing to pay you a fee as you wish.”

“We don’t take money, Mrs Cartier, that’s not the point. But we already have an assignment, and...”

“Are you crazy!” Pete hissed. “Of course we accept!”

“Wait a minute, Mrs Cartier,” Jupiter said and put his hand over the mouthpiece. “What’s the matter?” he asked Pete gruffly.

“We’ll take this job!” the Second Investigator repeated. “It’s as clear as daylight! I’m tired of Aunt Elenor!”

Jupiter frowned reluctantly. “Bob?” he asked.

Bob nodded and said: “I agree. A haunted house sounds a hundred times more interesting than a missing amulet. You just have to set priorities.”

The First Investigator sighed. Then he took his hand off the phone. “Mrs Cartier? We can stop by your house tomorrow.”

Mrs Cartier said thank you, then Jupiter got the address. When he hung up, he turned to Bob and Pete. “It can’t be like that,” he said firmly.

“Like what?” Pete wanted to know.

“We can’t just drop a case like this,” Jupiter replied.

“Case? I don’t see a case rummaging through a house,” Pete snapped. “Besides, we’ve already agreed. Aunt Elenor’s gonna have to do without us for a while. Like Bob said, “We have to set priorities.”

“It may be that this Mrs Cartier needs our help more than Aunt Elenor. Still, we can’t just let Aunt Elenor down. So two of us will go to the haunted house, one will go on to Aunt Elenor’s,” Jupiter said.

“Fantastic!” shouted Pete in a good mood. “Bob and I are going to the Cartier house and you keep digging in closets.”

“I’m afraid I can’t,” Jupiter fought back. “I don’t have a car and I can’t get to Malibu by bus. So inevitably one of you must go there.”

“Oh, and who are you thinking of?” Pete asked irritably.

“I don’t care,” Jupiter replied. “If you don’t agree, you have to draw lots.”

“I don’t see it that way,” Pete cried out again. “Why can’t all three of us take care of the new case? Aunt Elenor has definitely gone too far. I think it’s our right to drop the case. After all, we have no obligation.”

“Yes we do,” Jupiter disagreed. “A moral one.”

“Maybe you do, but not me. And that’s why I won’t set foot in that earthquake woman’s house again.”

Jupiter sighed. “Too many cases spoil the detective,” he said.

“What about you, Bob?” Pete asked. “You’re so admirable in the background. Does that mean you don’t care and you’d go to Aunt Elenor’s?”

Bob shook his head vigorously. “No. I just don’t want to argue with you guys... but I think one of us could continue to search for Aunt Elenor.”

“Then you’ll have to draw lots,” the First Investigator decided.

“Why don’t you go if it’s so important to you?” Pete asked.

“I told you—I don’t have a car,” Jupiter said.

“And why don’t we just let it go?” Pete snapped back.

“I told you that too, because we have a moral obligation and also a reputation to lose,” Jupiter replied calmly.

Angrily Pete threw himself back into his chair and folded his arms defiantly. “All right,” he grumbled. “Then we’ll draw lots.”

Jupiter fished for the matchbox next to the small stove. He took out two pieces of matchsticks and broke off one of the heads. Then he hid them behind his back and then stretched his two clenched fists forward. “Whoever chooses the broken match goes to Aunt Elenor,” he decided.

Pete and Bob looked at each other. “You first,” Bob said, and Pete, after a little hesitation, tapped Jupiter’s right fist.

Jupiter opened both his fists. Pete’s got the broken match.

7. Pete Freaks Out

With screeching tyres, Pete stopped in front of the house in Malibu Beach. He opened the door, jumped out of the car and slammed the door just as energetically. Slightly faster than he was allowed to, he had rushed to the coast here because he wanted to get his job done as quickly as possible. Jupe and Bob were already on their way to see Lydia Cartier, maybe they were already there, maybe they had witnessed the spook or even solved it. And he was doomed to look for Aunt Elenor's stupid amulet. Pete decided today to be a little more rabid on the search, no matter what Aunt Elenor said. He could also find the amulet and close the case, then immediately drive back to Rocky Beach to their new client.

The Second Investigator rang. Elenor Madigan opened the door.

She looked tired and confused. "Will Jupiter and Rob be joining us?" she asked.

"Bob," Pete replied mechanically. "No. We have another matter to deal with at short notice, so I'm here alone for a change today."

"Well, as you say," she replied, a little pricked. Then she theatrically raised her right hand to her forehead and moaned: "Oh, I have such a migraine today, I have to lie down right away."

"How unfortunate," Pete grumbled unkindly and pushed himself past her into the house.

Miss Madigan followed him. "If you could please be a little quieter today, I really need my rest. I'm going to rest in the salon, so that's your taboo zone today."

"All right," Pete replied curtly and went up the stairs. So at least he was far away from the 'salon', as Miss Madigan called her living room. He began his search in the guest room, but was not undisturbed for long. Miss Madigan stood in the door and complained about the noise he had made when moving the bed. Then she didn't like it that Pete examined the storeroom. And finally, she wouldn't let him down to the basement. Not only was she getting more and more irritated. Pete's mood also worsened from minute to minute. He felt that his patience had reached boiling point and he feared he could explode soon. In the end, however, he really tried his best to not to.

The Second Investigator was in the bathroom, which was furnished with a mixture of perfumery and bottles of ointments, searching through the countless cupboards filled with equally countless bottles, jars and vials as Elenor Madigan stood at the door once again. Pete just had a small bowl in his hand with colourful bath pearls in it.

"No!" she shouted. "Put that down right now! Do you know where I got that bowl? I bought it from a Chinese street vendor for an incredible price!" She did not say whether the price had been incredibly high or incredibly low.

Pete obediently puts this supposedly so-precious article back.

"What are you doing in the bathroom? I've said it before that I don't want cabinets rummaged through."

"I'm not rummaging through your cabinets," Pete corrected, "I'm going through them. That's why I'm here, after all."

"But not in the bathroom!" Miss Madigan disagreed. "You really can't do that!"

Pete took a deep breath. Deep within him, he felt the thread of patience finally torn. "Where should I look then?" he asked sharply.

“Well, in any place where the amulet could be,” said Miss Madigan and her irritation was also clearly noticeable.

“And where, please, is that supposed to be?” Pete asked.

“Well, you must know that! You’re the detective!” Miss Madigan snapped.

“That’s right. And that’s why you should leave it to us where we look. I think your amulet might well be here in the bathroom, so I’m searching the cabinets,” countered Pete.

“No, no,” she replied.

“But yes!” Pete said a little too loudly. “You gave us this assignment, but you won’t let us do our job. It is constantly said that we should not search here and not there and that we should not touch this and that. Then where should we look?”

“At least not in my cabinets,” Miss Madigan said, annoyed.

“Good,” Pete replied curtly. “Then, unfortunately, we cannot find your amulet. Otherwise, we’ve looked everywhere.”

“Oh, I thought you guys were such great detectives,” came her reply.

“So we are,” Pete replied confidently. “Provided you do not interfere with our work. But you’ve been doing that all this while. Since we arrived here the day before yesterday, you have been doing nothing but reprimanding us and telling us what we are not allowed to do. Have you considered why we still haven’t found your amulet?”

Miss Madigan opened her eyes in indignation and took a deep breath. “I won’t let you talk to me like that!” she snapped.

Another head appeared in the bathroom door. It was Ethan Easton. “What’s going on here?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Pete said ruggedly. He turned to Miss Madigan: “If you don’t want to be talked to like that, then don’t interfere. You have two choices: Either I can search through as many cabinets here as I see fit, or you can ask someone else to look for your amulet.”

Again Elenor Madigan gasped for air. “And Kelly was so fond of you!” she shouted, outraged. “I guess she was very wrong about that—that she fell for guys like you—and especially you! I can’t believe it!”

Pete stared at her darkly. “The explanation is simple,” he said. “Friends can be chosen. Unfortunately relatives can’t.”

Aunt Elenor now opened her eyes so wide that Pete believed they would immediately plop out of the sockets and mingle with the bath pearls in the Chinese bowl. “That’s enough,” she gasped. “Get out!” She stretched out her arm imperiously and pointed through the door to the stairs leading down.

She almost bored her finger into Mr Easton’s cheek.

Without saying another word, Pete walked past her with two long steps and hurried down the stairs. Miss Madigan was obviously so shocked that she stayed in the bathroom.

But Ethan Easton followed him. “What’s the matter?” he asked Pete when he opened the front door.

Pete just looked at him and said, “You really have a remarkable landlady.” He paused but didn’t want to give long explanations.

“Is the case of the missing amulet over?” Mr Easton wanted to know.

“You can count on it.” Pete looked back into the entrance hall one last time and his gaze was caught by the green-grey print. “Goodbye, Green Iron Woman,” he said, then he stepped outside and closed the door. He ran to his car, got in and let the engine howl before he drove off. He just had to get out of there!

On his way back to Rocky Beach, a thousand thoughts went through his mind. He was freaked out, and that shouldn’t have happened. He should never have yelled at Aunt Elenor

like that. Jupiter would give him hell if he found out. Not to mention Kelly. But on the other hand, Elenor Madigan had also behaved more than rude. Seen in this light, Pete's reaction had been nothing but compensatory justice.

For the time being, Pete chased away the thoughts of this unpleasant incident. Courageously he decided to go directly to Lydia Cartier, where he hoped to meet Jupiter and Bob. He thought, at a client's house, Jupiter wouldn't take it out on him. That should buy him more time for Jupiter to calm down by the time they left.

Pete signalled and turned off to Rocky Beach.

At first, Lydia Cartier's house reminded him of Elenor Madigan's. It was big, glorious and suggested that its resident was not exactly poor. At second glance, Pete noticed that there were huge differences to Aunt Elenor's house. This house was old and had a certain dignity, and the dark grey walls and the heavy brown wooden door gave an eerie feeling. Bob's sun-yellow VW Beetle was parked on the road. Pete stopped right behind it.

When he rang, a gong sounded. A little later, a small blonde woman in a white apron opened the door.

"Yes?" she asked.

"Hello, my name is Pete Crenshaw. I'm here to see Mrs Lydia Cartier, my two friends are already here."

"I didn't know anyone else was coming," the woman replied.

"I'm not expected to, but I'm with them," Pete assured her.

The young woman let him in and led him through a long, dark hallway, where some equally dark paintings hung, into a large living room. Jupe and Bob were sitting there in a clunky leather suite. Opposite them sat a woman of whom Pete estimated to be in her mid-sixties. Her grey hair was tucked up in an elaborate knot and she wore a dark costume that reminded him of the last century. There were cups and a teapot on a large table.

His two friends looked up in surprise as Pete entered the room.

"Pete!" cried Jupiter. "What are you doing here?" He introduced him to Lydia Cartier. After the Second Investigator sat down, Jupiter quickly asked, "Why aren't you with Aunt Elenor? Did you find the amulet?"

Pete shook his head. "I left early. The circumstances were, shall we say, unbearable." He gave Jupiter a look, which meant that they didn't necessarily have to discuss it here.

Jupiter understood. "We'll talk about this later," he decided.

Then he quickly briefed his friend what they had learned from Mrs Cartier.

The old lady has lived in this house for many years. Since her husband died, she was alone with her housekeeper Sigourney. She lived off her husband's inheritance. A few weeks ago she had begun to hear noises at night, strange thumping and knocking sounds that seemed to come from the walls or the ceiling. At first she had put it to construction works nearby, to the heating system or simply to the age of the house where parts of the wooden floors had started to deteriorate. But then the strange noises became louder and louder and more unusual and she could not figure out where they came from. One day suddenly, a chair had moved in another corner of the room, a few days later even a whole cupboard had moved a good deal.

Mrs Cartier continued: "And a week ago, I heard a loud clang from upstairs. When I went upstairs, I saw one of my vases smashed in the hallway. It had always stood on a pedestal for sure and suddenly, it just fell off."

"Do you hear these noises during the day?" Jupiter asked.

“Rarely. Only from time to time during the day did I hear a strange scratching sound from the upper floor.”

“Are the noises there every night?” Bob wanted to know.

“Almost every night,” Mrs Cartier replied. They could tell that this story was pretty annoying for her, but still she seemed composed.

No comparison to Aunt Elenor, Pete thought. The two women seemed to have only their age and their wealth in common.

“Could there be someone who wants to drive you out of your house?” Jupiter asked. The Three Investigators had often dealt with cases in which skilful diversions or deceptions were used to chase someone away.

“Me? From my house? What makes you say that?” Mrs Cartier asked.

“Well, it’s possible someone is trying to scare you because they want you out of the house,” Jupiter replied.

Mrs Cartier was visibly surprised. “So you don’t think there are any supernatural phenomena here, but it’s a human who’s staging all this?”

“That’s what I’m assuming. Either it is a human or a natural phenomenon, but certainly not a supernatural one. I don’t believe in spooks,” Jupiter said.

“I haven’t thought about that at all,” Mrs Cartier confessed. “But I don’t know anybody who wants to drive me out here. I also can’t imagine how anyone could make those creepy noises without me noticing.”

“Is there anyone who might have wanted to buy the house?” Bob asked.

Lydia Cartier shook her head.

Sigourney, the housekeeper, came in and brought another cup for Pete, then she poured him tea and disappeared.

“Did your housekeeper Sigourney hear anything?” Jupiter asked quietly after she went off.

“I don’t know exactly. She’s only here during the day, not at night, but she was in the house during some of the incidents. If she’d noticed anything, I believe she will not show it.”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip, which was a sure sign that he was thinking hard. “We need to get an idea of what this is all about,” he thought out loud. “The best thing would be if we could hear the sounds.”

Lydia Cartier smiled. “I’m afraid I didn’t record the sounds,” she said.

Jupiter returned the smile. He liked the old lady at first sight. When he looked at her, he first remembered the word ‘decent’ and he also caught himself in a direct comparison with Aunt Elenor. “We’d have to hear it ourselves,” he said. “Maybe it’s possible that...”

At that moment, he was interrupted by a loud rumble coming from directly above.

8. A Clear Case

The Three Investigators and Mrs Cartier turned their heads to the ceiling.

The sound stopped. It sounded as if a heavy object was being dragged over the floor of the room above. Bob remembered how his father had once moved furniture upstairs. That's exactly how it sounded down there.

"There it is again!" whispered Mrs Cartier, and Jupiter saw the fear in her eyes. "That's the sound!"

Pete was the first to react. He jumped up and ran to the door. The other two followed him. By then, the sound had faded away.

As Pete stormed up the wide stairs, he wondered where the room above the living room was. He reached the top of the stairs and found himself in a long corridor with two doors on the right and three on the left. One door on right was open and Sigourney's head peered out. She looked scared.

"Did you hear something?" Pete wanted to know.

She nodded.

"Which room is above the living room?" he asked. She paused and then pointed to the opposite door and Pete ran towards it and ripped open the door. Dark curtains in front of the windows swallowed almost all the light. Pete groped in vain for a light switch, then he crossed the room and brushed the curtains aside. He looked around the room. Nobody was there. Just then, Bob and Jupiter showed up at the door.

"And?" Jupiter asked, out of breath, clambering up the stairs. He was the heaviest of The Three Investigators, and although he had recently been losing a lot of weight, his condition was not the best. "Did you see anyone?"

Pete shook his head. The room seemed to be the study with a large desk at a corner. On the wall behind it there was a large board showing the family tree of the Cartier family. Pete saw many French names on the chart, as Lydia Cartier came from France.

The room was quite sparsely furnished: Apart from the desk, a few bookshelves and a large wooden chest, there was nothing, and especially, no place to hide.

"Must have been the chest," remarked Jupiter expertly. Then he went out the door and spoke to Sigourney, who was still stretching her head out from the opposite door. "Did you see anything?" Jupiter asked. The young woman shook her head anxiously. "Can you tell me if the chest is always in this place?"

Now Sigourney was forced to leave her hiding place behind the door. Hesitantly she stepped out and glanced into the room from the hallway. "Yes," she said curtly and went back to the room she had come from. She closed the door.

Now Mrs Cartier came up the stairs too. "What is it?" she wanted to know.

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't see anything. And everything seems to be in its place, too."

Mrs Cartier entered the room and looked around once. "Yes," she said, "it's all the same."

Jupiter pinched his lower lip again. "And this room is directly above the living room?" The old lady nodded.

“Then the sound came from this room. What else besides the chest could have caused it?”

“It was some sort of a grinding noise,” Bob said. “Someone must have pulled or pushed something over the floor.”

“That’s exactly what it sounded like,” Pete agreed. He went over to the chest with the intention of pulling it. At the last moment he thought of something better and pulled out a handkerchief so as not to smear any fingerprints on the brass handles. The chest was not very heavy and dragged loudly over the wooden floor. “Why don’t you go downstairs and see if it sounds like it just did,” he suggested.

Bob left the room and ran down the stairs. A short time later Pete pushed the chest back and forth again. When Bob came back upstairs, he nodded.

“The same sound,” he said curtly.

Mrs Cartier, who had watched them in silence, smiled approvingly. “You’re real professionals, aren’t you?” she remarked. “I’m very impressed. Do you think you can help me?”

Jupiter rubbed his chin. “At least we can try. We already know someone moved the chest while we were downstairs.”

“But there’s nobody here!” Mrs Cartier objected.

“Maybe...” Jupiter said, “we were just too slow to catch the culprit.”

“You mean I have a burglar in my house?” she asked, frightened.

“That’s what we need to find out. You said the sounds came mainly at night. We need to get a clearer picture of this. Would it be possible for us to spend the night here?”

Lydia Cartier nodded. “Of course. In fact, I’d be very grateful. I’d feel a lot safer knowing I wasn’t alone in the house. I also have a guest room. But there are only two beds there.”

“That does not matter,” Jupiter replied. “At least one of us has to be awake anyway.”

“Can you stay here tonight?” she asked.

The Three Investigators were surprised by the quick offer.

Jupiter was thinking. He thought about his date with Lys that night and that they wanted to go to the movies. Then he gave himself a jolt. “Yes, if you don’t mind.” He then turned to Pete and Bob.

“I’ll be writing a geography paper next week and I’ll have to learn a little more,” Bob said, “but it’s the weekend, I’ve got plenty of time.” Pete also agreed.

“Then I suggest that we go home now and get our sleeping gear and other necessary equipment. One thing, Mrs Cartier, please not to touch the chest. We want to check it for fingerprints.”

“I won’t touch anything,” the old lady assured him.

They left the room and went down to the door. “By the way, there might be someone else coming,” Jupiter told Mrs Cartier when they said goodbye, thinking of Lys. Maybe he could persuade her to spend the evening with him a little different than planned. He would have liked to have gone out with her, but now his acumen and nose were required at Lydia Cartier’s house. He had to find out what weird things were happening there.

“That’s fine with me,” Mrs Cartier replied.

“Clear case,” Pete said as they stood in front of the cars.

It was already getting dark and the air was pleasantly cool. “It was probably the housekeeper, Sigourney. She had enough time to leave the room before I got to the top. She was also standing at the door of the opposite room,” Pete said.

Bob nodded. “I agree. The case could be solved quickly.”

Jupiter looked at them reproachfully and said: "Since when do we work with hasty judgements?"

"What judgement?" Pete asked hypocritically. "It was just a theory."

"You just said something about a clear case. I think we should be more careful. Finally, there are two questions: first, what motive would Sigourney have to scare the old lady?"

"Maybe she wants Mrs Cartier to sell the house because she wants it herself," Bob thought.

"If she had so much money, she wouldn't be a housekeeper," Jupiter contradicted.

"Well, one cannot tell. Maybe she has a rich friend," said Pete, grinning as he imagined the little silent woman in the arms of a multi-millionaire.

"Second," Jupiter continued unflinchingly, "Mrs Cartier said Sigourney was only in the house during the day, but the incidents were mostly at night."

"As a housekeeper, she might have a key," Bob surmised.

"Right," Jupiter nodded. "But wouldn't it be foolish to play ghost while we're there in the house? She should have waited until we have left."

"You're right about that, though," Pete admitted. He was secretly annoyed that Jupe always had decisive thoughts to confirmed or disproved a theory. Why couldn't he come up with these ideas?

"But now for something else," Jupiter turned to Pete. "So what happened to Aunt Elenor? Very clever, by the way, to meet us at Mrs Cartier's. You knew I couldn't deal with the subject there and then. I didn't think you were capable of this." He looked at him sharply.

Pete grinned embarrassed. "It worked, didn't it?"

"Out with it! What happened at Aunt Elenor's?" Jupiter demanded.

"Well, what could have happened? Nothing new, actually, except for the fact that it had clearly gone too far today. You experienced it yourself, but you should have seen what she did today. She was supposed to have a migraine."

He stretched the last word infinitely. And then he reported at length about his afternoon at Aunt Elenor's. He decorated some of the details to try to make his friends believe that he couldn't react any differently.

But Jupiter's disapproving facial expression remained. "You shouldn't have done that, Pete," he said.

"You say that because you weren't there," he returned confidently. "If you were me, you'd have reacted the same way. Besides, we have a new case after all, and as a Second Investigator, I have the right to be with you for the investigation."

"We have a new case, yes, but we also had an old one," Jupiter snapped.

"Wrong," Pete retorted. "That wasn't a case, it was a joke. We had a rogue flea market owner who wanted to abuse our criminal skills to find a probably worthless thing she calls an amulet."

"Criminological..." Jupiter the know-it-all corrected him. "Criminal skills are needed for stealing the amulet. Criminological skills are for solving the crime."

Pete sighed. He hated it when Jupiter so often shows off his knowledge. He had often proved that he was a walking encyclopedia, but must he show it off at every opportunity?

"Pete's right," Bob rushed to his aid. "We should not have agreed to it from the beginning."

This time Jupiter sighed. "Then this would probably be the first case that The Three Investigators did not solve," he said sadly, but Pete heard that his affliction was not meant seriously and that he had already forgiven him. Probably in his role as leader of The Three Investigators he sometimes had to be a bit over-ambitious, whether he wanted to or not.

“We will solve the next one with flying colours,” Jupiter continued in a good mood. “So, let’s get our gear.”

They got into the cars and drove back to the Jones Salvage Yard. When they entered Headquarters, Bob immediately saw that the red light on the answering machine was on again. He rewound the tape and played it back.

“It’s me, Kelly,” the voice of Pete’s girlfriend sounded off the speaker. “If Pete shows up at any time, have him call me immediately!” It beeped.

“She sounded pretty pissed off,” Bob grinned at Pete. “Then call her back before you feel her holy wrath.”

Pete made a grimace. “Very funny.”

At this moment the phone rang. Jupiter picked up the phone and turned on the loudspeaker. “Jupiter Jones of The Three Investigators?”

“Kelly, here. Finally someone answers. Is Pete there?”

“We just came back. He’s standing beside me,” Jupe passed the phone on. “For you,” he said and grinned as gloatingly as Bob had before.

Pete rolled his eyes and picked up the phone. “Yes?”

“Hello,” Kelly said in an icy voice. “Aunt Elenor called me this afternoon. What do you think you’re doing—” Pete turned off the loudspeaker and listened motionlessly to Kelly’s sermon.

Behind his back, Jupe and Bob made painful faces and Bob shook his right hand as if he had burned himself.

9. Poltergeists

“So it seems that Kelly convinced you after all,” Jupiter said when they were on their way back to Mrs Cartier. After Kelly and Pete had argued on the phone for a while, she persuaded him to continue the search for her great-aunt’s amulet as soon as the case with Lydia Cartier was closed. “Or was it more of a generous way to save you further trouble?”

Pete preferred not to answer.

There were four of them in Bob’s small Beetle. Jupe had called Lys, who surprisingly quickly agreed to spend the evening differently. She had told him that she had already acted in a scary film, and now she would find it exciting to experience a real spook. Bob and Pete didn’t mind Lys coming along. She was a very intelligent girl and maybe she could even help them that night—provided something happened at all.

Lydia Cartier opened the door and greeted The Three Investigators and their companion. “I’m so glad you came. I feel a lot safer now. I’m especially glad you don’t think I’m crazy. I wouldn’t have known who to turn to if it weren’t for you.”

“I just thought of something,” Bob began. “How did you come to contact us? You were talking about one of our old clients gave you our phone number. Who was this client?”

Lydia Cartier smiled: “It was Mrs Smith, a long-time friend of mine. She was very enthusiastic about you three and told me in detail how you had helped her a while back.”

Bob was thinking. Who was Mrs Smith? Smith was a common name and he couldn’t remember which of the many cases they solved involved a Mrs Smith.

But Jupiter, with his infallible memory, knew immediately who it was. “Mrs Smith, of course!”

Bob, suddenly remembered now. “The thing about the screaming alarm clock? My goodness, it’s been ages. That was one of our earlier cases!”

A long time ago, The Three Investigators saved Mrs Smith’s husband from prison when he was wrongly accused of stealing valuable paintings. A strange alarm clock had played an important role then.

“Yes, Mary Smith.” Lydia Cartier nodded. “It was through her that I came to you.”

Then she showed the four of them the whole house, which she hadn’t had the chance to do in the afternoon. It was very stylishly furnished. There were fantastic old furniture everywhere that Lys couldn’t get enough of. On the upper floor there was a small studio, as Mrs Cartier was a passionate painter.

After the tour they made themselves comfortable in the dining room. Sigourney had prepared a snack shortly before she left work. Now five of them sat at a small round table and ate sandwiches.

“How long has Sigourney been working for you?” Bob wanted to know.

“For three years. She is really a sweet girl. If I didn’t have her, I wouldn’t even know what to do. The house is so big, an old woman like me would never be able to keep it in good shape by myself.”

Then Jupiter cautiously said, “Mrs Cartier, we have a suspicion. We think Sigourney might be the one who caused these incidents. It would be possible, since she was upstairs when we heard the rumble this afternoon.”

Mrs Cartier looked at him in astonishment. Hopefully she won't react the way Aunt Elenor would, Jupiter thought. But the old lady was much gentler. "No, I don't think so. Sigourney is so nice to me, and she helps me wherever she can. She wouldn't have any reason at all to do such a thing."

"Are you sure about this? Couldn't there be a reason for her to want to scare you?" Jupiter continued.

She thought about it and then shook her head. "No."

"Would she want to have this house?" Pete asked straight out.

Lydia Cartier laughed. "No, I don't think so. We talked about it a few times, but Sigourney says she'd love to work here, but she does not want to live in a house this big. It was too scary for her."

"Does she have a key of her own?" Pete continued.

"Yes, she does. But she's not here at night, so it couldn't have been her. Besides, I'd hear it if someone opened the door downstairs."

Lys, who was not as well informed as The Three Investigators, asked what exactly had happened. Mrs Cartier told them the events again.

"I am surprised that you think from the beginning that there is a stranger in my house who is staging all this," she continued. "Couldn't it be that there's actually a ghost?"

The four of them looked at her. They were uncomfortable with giving an answer. She might still be afraid that others think she was crazy.

"We don't believe in ghosts, Mrs Cartier," Bob spoke up. "There must be a logical explanation for everything. But we'll figure it out. And we can start right away with the chest. We brought our equipment to take fingerprints."

After dinner, Lys and Pete started washing the dishes, while Jupe and Bob went upstairs. Bob was the expert on such techniques and it was his job to check whether anyone had left fingerprints on the brass handles of the chest. He took the package of fine white powder out of the bag and applied the dust to the metal with a brush. Where the hands had touched the handles, the powder would remain stuck. But he was disappointed. Lines were clearly visible, but they were the lines of a palm, not those of fingertips.

"Actually logical," Bob judged the result, "you don't pull such a heavy chest with fingers. Fingerprints are therefore not there, of course."

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "It was worth a try," he said. "Come on, let's go down and help the others dry the dishes."

They stepped into the hallway and Bob held Jupiter back by his arm.

"Maybe we should take a quick look around Sigourney's room," he suggested and was already at the opposite door. It wasn't locked. The room was sparsely furnished. There were some shelves with cleaning supplies and other household items. There was also a small sofa and a table with an open book on it. It was the paperback edition of a thriller by Stephen King. "Hmm," Bob mumbled. "This is where she must be during her breaks. Not very exciting."

"What did you expect?" Jupiter asked.

A little later, Mrs Cartier wished the four goodnight and went to bed. The Three Investigators and Lys then settled into the guest room. Pete and Bob stretched out on the guest beds, Lys and Jupe lounged on the floor.

"All we can do now is wait," Jupe said. "We have taken the necessary preparations. Each door is attached a strand of hair that would detach if the door is opened." Bob stroked his head and thought of the painful procedure after he had been chosen to donate the strands of hair.

"We'll know if anyone is haunting the house if something should happen again," Jupiter continued. "I've told Mrs Cartier not to leave her room, but to call for help if necessary so the hair traps can detect doors opening."

"I've been thinking about the things Mrs Cartier told us," Bob said. "Everything that's happened actually points to a ghost—a so-called poltergeist." Not only was Bob passionate about music, he was well-read. He used to work part-time at the Rocky Beach Library and had a lot of opportunities to access and browse the material there. He was particularly taken by ghost stories, so he knew his way around ghosts and mythical figures."

"Poltergeist? Isn't that a movie," Pete asked, yawning.

"Yes, but not a very realistic one if you ask me. In the movie, the poltergeists were visible beings, but if you check out the allegedly true testimonies of people who have experienced poltergeists, then these supernatural beings are rather invisible. They are more like a local spook, as they always stay in one place. There is also a personal spook, but they are not considered poltergeists. Poltergeists live—or rather exist—mostly in old houses and are supposedly responsible for physical disturbances such as making noises and moving objects around. They are actually harmless, because they can't do anything to people except to scare the hell out of them."

"That's enough for me," Lys said.

"You talk as if you really believe these stories, Bob," Jupiter remarked, raising an eyebrow doubtfully.

"I didn't say I believed in it. That's just what I read. There are people who seriously deal with haunting phenomena. From Mrs Cartier's description of the incidents here, it matches what a poltergeist does."

"Or someone who knows as much as you, using poltergeist legends to scare Lydia Cartier," Jupiter thought.

"Exactly," Pete added in.

"Maybe it's really some kind of a ghost," said Lys. "Wouldn't it be exciting?"

Jupe wiped the idea away with a gesture. "Nonsense. I don't believe in poltergeists."

"Neither do I," Lys defended himself. "But it'd still be exciting."

"What do we do now?" Pete wanted to know. "Should two of us go to sleep while the other two stay awake? Or is one guard enough?"

"Two's better," Bob suggested. "Shall we patrol the house?"

"Not a bad idea," Jupiter said. "But keep it down, or Mrs Cartier will think we're the ghost."

Jupe and Lys took the first watch while Bob and Pete slept. They went into the dining room to talk and not disturb the two of them. Jupe enjoyed it with Lys alone, and the opportunity to talk to her undisturbed. Actually, it was even better than going to the movies: Sitting in the dining room of a strange house by the light of a small lamp while everyone else was asleep had something romantic about it, he had to admit to himself. At first they talked about Bob's ghost stories, but soon they wandered away from this topic and talked about all kinds of things. They didn't even know how time passed. Only when the large grandfather clock struck one in the living room next door did they look up in surprise.

"It's so late," Lys said. "Are we going to change shift now?"

"Why don't we stay here until we are sleepy? Then we can wake them to take over. Right now I'm wide awake."

"Me too."

Suddenly they heard a loud rumble! They were startled.

The rumbling repeated. It sounded like one they heard in the afternoon, only louder and more threatening. And it came from above.

“Go!” cried Jupiter. “You wake the others, I’ll run upstairs!” He jumped up and ran into the hall and up the stairs. It was still rumbling. Now he heard Mrs Cartier screaming loudly from her bedroom. Jupiter ran up to her bedroom door and tried to open it, but it was locked. He shook it and shouted: “Mrs Cartier, open up!”

The rumbling didn’t stop, it sounded as if the whole room was shaking. Again the old lady screamed.

“Mrs Cartier!”

“I can’t! I can’t! The key!” she shouted from the inside.

Jupiter now shook the door harder and was about to kick it in. All hell broke loose in there. Perhaps Mrs Cartier was in danger! At that moment, Lys, Bob and Pete came running. “Pete! Hurry! Your lock picks!”

Pete ripped open the little case of lock picks that he always carried with him. With nimble fingers he looked for the matching metal hook. He was about to try to open the lock when the noise stopped abruptly. Suddenly it was completely silent.

“Mrs Cartier?” called Jupiter. In the sudden silence he heard his heart beat loudly. He felt a bead of sweat running down his temple.

Seconds passed, then a key was inserted into the lock from the inside and turned around. A moment later the door slowly opened. A snow-white figure stood before them.

Only a moment later did Jupe realize that it was Mrs Cartier wearing a white nightgown. She had her light grey hair down and stared at the four of them in a state of shock. The bedroom was completely devastated: A chest of drawers stood in the middle of the room, the bedside table had fallen down. A chair was lying on the bed and clothes were scattered all over the room.

“Heavens!” Pete whispered when he saw the chaos. Slowly they went into the room and took a closer look at the mess.

“What happened, Mrs Cartier?” asked Jupiter. He had to pull himself together to give his voice a firm sound.

The old lady was in complete disarray. “It was awful!” she sobbed. “I woke up when I heard the rumble. Then I turned on the lights. Everything... the dresser, the chair, the bedside table, everything suddenly moved. I called for help and it got worse. The furniture... it moved across the room by itself. I jumped out of bed and wanted to get out. But the door was locked and when I reached for the key, he flew out of the lock and landed under the bed. I couldn’t get to it then.”

“And then?” Jupiter asked breathlessly.

“Then it was over. All of a sudden everything was quiet, just like that.”

“Did you see anything?” Bob asked.

“That’s it,” Mrs Cartier replied, pointing to the chaos around her. Bob secretly admired her because she had already half grasped herself back in those few seconds. Then he noticed that her hands were still shaking.

“I mean, have you seen any figure? Or anything else?”

She shook her head.

Then the door behind them slammed shut with a loud bang.

10. A Sleepless Night

They immediately turned around and for a second, they stared motionless at the closed door, then Pete jumped on the latch, pushed it down and tore the door open. He had expected that it would not budge, but it swung open. Pete quickly looked out into the hallway. No one was there. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"Maybe it was just a draught," he tried to calm the others and himself, pointing to the bedroom window which was opened.

"The window!" Jupiter cried and walked up to it. Why didn't he think of it right away? Mrs Cartier explained that was opened otherwise she wouldn't be able to sleep. He looked out at the street, and found nothing peculiar.

Jupiter turned around and asked: "Is it possible for someone to get in through the window? When did you turn on the lights?"

"I can't remember," Mrs Cartier shrugged and sighed. Then she sat on the bed exhausted. "Maybe I didn't turn it on right away," she admitted. "I struggled to get to the light switch because I was so scared. But I saw in the semi-darkness that the furniture was moving."

"Did you see anything else? A person? A shadow?" Jupiter replied.

"No. I... I don't think so," she stammered.

"I'm almost sure someone went in through the window and then ravaged the room. Bob, Pete, we need to check our hair traps and see if we can find any leads outside. Directly under the window is a small flower bed where footprints should be clearly visible." Jupe gave Lys a look and she understood.

As The Three Investigators left the room, Lys sat on the bed next to Mrs Cartier. For her, it seemed more important to take care of the old lady and to calm her down. The three would later return to check the furniture for fingerprints.

While Pete looked all over the house to check on the hair traps, Jupe and Bob went outside armed with torches. "Careful, we must not destroy any tracks."

"If there are any," Bob said, shining his torch at the ground below the bedroom window. The flower bed was freshly raked, and there were no footprints.

"Sigourney is really very thorough," Jupiter muttered.

"So you do think she's behind this?" Bob asked in astonishment.

The First Investigator shook his head. "No, I mean the flower bed. It is very neatly laid out and the earth is raked so carefully that one could even see bird tracks, but there aren't any." He looked up at the window.

"It's still possible to get to the top without leaving a trace. With a rope and a hook thrown up to the window sill or roof, you could climb up without stepping on the flower bed." They searched the small front garden, but did not find any traces there either. Then they returned to the house where Pete was expecting them.

"There's news. The hair on the door to the kitchen and dining room is gone," he announced.

Jupiter's face brightened, but then he sighed disappointedly.

"That was Lys and me, we were in the dining room. But I'm sure nobody came through the door, we were inside all the time."

“Well, all the other hair traps are intact, unfortunately.” Pete continued. “So the intruder must have come through the window,” he sighed. “Let’s go upstairs and check the furniture for fingerprints.”

They returned to the bedroom, and Bob set to work. Mrs Cartier was still sitting on the bed, but she seemed to have regained her composure.

Anyway, she tried hard not to let anything show. “It’s never been this bad,” she said. “I’m glad you are all here.”

“Do you think you can sleep again?” Lys asked worriedly.

Mrs Cartier nodded. “I’m all right, thanks.”

It took Bob a while to finish his work. In the end, he had a whole bunch of pretty good fingerprints. He lifted them off with an adhesive foil and put them on a piece of paper, which he carefully put into a plastic cover. “Would you mind if I took your fingerprints, Mrs Cartier? Then we can immediately eliminate some of the prints.” She immediately agreed, and Bob got his ink pad to take the prints. Then Mrs Cartier disappeared into the bathroom next door to wash her hands, while The Three Investigators and Lys cleaned up the room.

“We will continue to stay awake,” Jupiter assured her when she returned. “And nearby. But I don’t think anything’s gonna happen today. Sleep well!”

They said goodnight to Mrs Cartier for the second time that night and went into the guest room.

“I’m wide awake,” Bob said. “And I also believe that I will stay that way. Good thing it’s a weekend.”

The others felt the same. Nobody could think of sleep now.

“That scared the life out of me,” Lys said.

“Not just you,” Pete said.

“And you really think someone came through the window?” she asked.

“That’s the only way,” Jupiter replied. “Mrs Cartier said that she did not manage to turn on the lights immediately. The intruder could have left when she finally did.”

“Next time, we’ll just have to be more attentive. And faster,” said Bob.

“Next time?” Lys said, irritated. “Next time, I won’t be here, though. That was enough for me. I really don’t envy your hobby.”

“Sometimes I don’t either,” Pete murmured.

“Tomorrow I’ll take Sigourney’s fingerprints, too,” Bob decided. “After all, she cleans for Mrs Cartier, so her prints are probably on the furniture. Of course, even with her prints, we can’t prove that she did it.”

Jupiter frowned. “Do you really trust this petite person to climb the house wall?”

Bob shrugged his shoulders. “Anyway, I’m gonna check the prints at Headquarters first thing in the morning. Let’s see what comes out of it.”

They talked for a very, very long time. When the sun rose, the four were so tired that they decided to sleep a few more hours. Lys and Jupe got the two beds this time, while Bob and Pete laid down on the floor in blankets. But their sleep was restless and full of confusing dreams.

The next day, Jupiter was rudely awakened by Bob.

“Hey, Jupe, wake up! It’s ten o’clock. Sigourney made breakfast for us.” Jupiter rolled to the side, drowsily, then opened his eyes a bit. Bob and Lys were standing next to him.

Suddenly he was awake. He was embarrassed that Lys had watched him sleep. “Already there,” he said and swung out of bed.

At breakfast, Bob explained to Sigourney and asked her for her fingerprints. At first she looked a little frightened, but asked no further questions. She was as restrained and

monosyllabic as the day before.

After breakfast, the visitors said goodbye to Mrs Cartier and promised to return in the evening. Until then, they had some things to do.

“Can you take me home first, Bob?” Lys asked.

“Sure,” Bob replied. “Are you coming back tonight?”

Lys shook her head so hard that her blond hair flew back and forth. “Certainly not. That one sleepless night was enough for me. Besides, I have a date with Kelly and Elizabeth.”

“Aha. One of your women evenings,” mocked Bob.

“Exactly. We’ll have to talk about you three sometime,” she smiled.

Bob dropped Lys off at her apartment and then drove to Headquarters. He moaned when he got out. “I have to go home sometime,” he complained.

“First, the work,” Jupiter said firmly. “You have to check the fingerprints. We want to give an initial report to Mrs Cartier tonight.”

“Funny,” Pete murmured. “A few days ago you were in such a bad mood over the work that was left behind, and now you let yourself be distracted by this poltergeist thing. What about your plans to clean up Headquarters and update the computer files?”

“One must set priorities,” Jupiter said in a gentlemanly manner. “Headquarters won’t run away from us, the alleged ghosts might.”

“Why do poltergeists exist,” Pete wanted to know, and turned to Bob, who was already bent over the microscope and was evaluating the fingerprints. “I mean, assuming that they exist, what does ghost science say about them?”

Bob just shrugged his shoulders. “My understanding is that ghosts are spirits who cannot rest. Who knows why they haunt?”

“Could Mrs Cartier’s ghost be her late husband?” Pete wanted to know.

“Possible,” Bob replied. “Or a former occupant of the house. It’s hard to say.”

Jupiter frowned. “You sound like you really believe that.”

“We don’t,” Pete assured him. “But if you’re right and someone is using the information about poltergeists to frighten Mrs Cartier, it makes sense to know the motives. Does he want to portray her deceased husband or just some ghost or what?”

“But pure speculation won’t get us anywhere. It’s not enough that we’re just there in the house—we saw that last night. We need to a plan for tonight. And I’ve already come up with something.”

11. Solo Entries

“Has the other two been so scared last night that only two of you are here today?” asked Mrs Cartier in surprise when Jupe and Bob were led into the dining room by Sigourney.

“Lys wasn’t really one of the team,” Jupe explained, “and Pete apologizes. He may come later.”

“Sit down and have a cup of tea with me. I look forward to your results.”

They sat down at the small round table, which had already been set, and Bob reported: “Unfortunately there is no good news. All the fingerprints are either yours or Sigourney’s. The burglar could have used gloves.”

“... If it was a burglar,” Mrs Cartier remarked.

“How does Sigourney actually behave towards you?” asked Jupiter. “She’s got to know what’s going on since we showed up and Bob wanted her fingerprints.”

Lydia Cartier nodded. “I talked to her about it this afternoon. Of course she herself noticed that something was wrong in this house, but she did not want to talk about it because she was afraid. Just like me.” She remained silent for a while, then continued a little quieter: “You may not always notice it, but I’m dying of fear. Today...” Her voice failed for a moment. She swallowed once and then continued: “Today at noon, shortly after you left, the display cabinet in the living room began to shake. It wobbled so hard that some glasses fell over and broke. I was sitting right next to it, watching helplessly.

“Again, I’m sure no one was in the room. After all, it was broad daylight. It’s a ghost, that’s for me to know now. Maybe you’re overwhelmed with this case by now. The best detective can’t handle a ghost. Maybe I should hire a medium to try to get in touch with the spirit to find out what I can do.”

“Let’s us try for a while longer,” Jupiter asked. “We just have to figure out what’s going on here. Maybe we can come up with results after tonight?”

The lady nodded. “All right, then. But if this goes on and you can’t find a solution, I’ll turn to a medium next week.”

At that moment, the table where Jupiter, Bob and Mrs Cartier were sitting at began to move. At first it was only a slight jerk, but then it shook and wobbled back and forth so strongly and quickly that the dishes clattered and the cups toppled over. The three stared at the table in disbelief. It was right in front of their eyes, right under their arms, which they had put on the tabletop. The table trembled as if it was alive!

Sigourney, who was just entering the room with a tray, gave a sharp scream and dropped it, the teapot broke with a loud burst and splashed its hot contents onto the carpet. At that moment the haunting stopped and the table stood still again, as if nothing had happened.

Bob was the first to recover from the horror and bent down to look under the table. There was nothing unusual there. Sigourney whimpered quietly and ran out of the room. A few moments later she came back in with a cloth and a bucket in her hand to wipe up the spilled tea.

“I’m sorry, Mrs Cartier,” she mumbled and scrubbed the floor, quivering.

“It’s all right,” the old lady replied with a brittle voice and rose from her chair. “Excuse me.” She walked out of the room.

Jupiter and Bob looked at each other. “Unbelievable,” Bob said. By this he meant not only the wobbly table, but also the fact that both Lydia Cartier and her housekeeper always tried to keep composed and not let anything show.

Jupiter straightened up and tried to pull himself together. He got up and dropped to his knees to examine the table. “We should turn it around,” he suggested and began to take away the cups and the dishes. Bob helped him. “There must be a hidden mechanism somewhere. Did you see anything, Sigourney?” he asked the young woman, who had just collected the broken pieces of the teapot. But she just shook her head and hurried on with her work.

Jupiter and Bob turned the table around. It was a round wooden table with three legs, which hardly offered the possibility to mount a mechanism on the legs or the table top.

“If it was a gadget, it would have to be quite big to make the table shake like that,” Bob remarked. “But there’s nothing here, nothing at all.”

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. He was thinking about a new theory. How could you make a table shake? Threads? Magnets acting on a metal core in the wood? But that would have been enough to move the table slightly, but not to shake it so hard that the cups overturned.

Frustrated, they put the table right again. Sigourney stood up and helped them.

“Did you ever notice anything else, Sigourney?” Jupiter wanted to know. “Something unusual? A sound, perhaps, or a figure?”

“No,” said the housekeeper. “No more than what Mrs Cartier has already told you.”

Jupiter wondered if she had ever spoken such a long sentence before. “Aren’t you afraid?” he asked her.

“Yes. But Mrs Cartier needs me here,” she replied and continued to set the table.

Jupiter thought about what else he could ask her, if it made any sense to continue doing that. He glanced helplessly over at Bob, who only raised his eyebrows.

At that moment, there was a clang right behind Jupiter’s head. He whirled around and saw something fall to the ground.

“Jupe!” Bob shouted. “Did something strike you?”

“No,” he said. “What was it?”

“A cup. It just flew through the air and crashed into the wall.”

Sigourney stared alternately from Jupiter to Bob and to the broken pieces on the floor. Her eyes were huge, but she didn’t say anything.

“Where did the cup come from?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“I don’t know, I only saw it at the last moment, too. Somewhere from there.” Bob pointed to the opposite wall. Jupiter went over to the sideboard. Of the cups that stood there, one was missing.

“And it just flew through the air?” Jupiter asked in disbelief.

Bob nodded. “Straight past your head.”

At that moment, Mrs Cartier entered the room. “What happened?” she asked. “I heard a clang.”

“Another attack by your poltergeist,” said Jupiter, pointing to the broken pieces that the diligent Sigourney had already collected. “This time it almost caused personal injury.” He sat down on the chair and rubbed his eyes. Like last night, it was only now that he realized that fear was creeping up in him. Wobbly tables and flying cups and not the slightest clue. What was next?

Mrs Cartier also let herself sink into a chair. She buried the face in her hands. “I can’t take it anymore,” she said tonelessly. “On Monday, I’m going to look for someone who knows about supernatural phenomena.”

Then we have two days left, Jupe thought. He wanted to solve this case at all costs, as the last two had already ended badly. First they didn't let them investigate the theft of the painting, then Pete gave up a case. This time he wanted to be successful—even if he didn't have the slightest idea how to do it. Perhaps Pete could achieve something that evening.

Sigourney soon said goodbye for the day. She left the house in a hurry, which Jupe and Bob couldn't blame her for—assuming she was innocent. It was Pete's turn to find out.

Pete put his book away. It had become too dark to read, but he did not want to switch on the light in the car in order to conserve the battery. He wondered if he should drive up a bit and read under a street lamp, but then he might be spotted. He had parked behind a small group of trees on the side of the road and could see Mrs Cartier's house through the trees. Now he was waiting for Sigourney to leave.

The outside light came on and the housekeeper came out. She walked up to her car, got in and drove off. Pete started his car and started slowly. In their detective career, The Three Investigators had sometimes had to follow someone by car, but Pete was always very nervous. It was always a tightrope act not to lose the car and to stay behind far enough so as not to attract attention.

Sigourney's car was moving towards downtown. There was not much traffic and so Pete let two other cars overtake him to keep a distance. Sigourney crossed the city centre and then drove into a residential area. Pete knew the area because Lys lived nearby. He continued to follow the car through the narrow streets until it stopped in front of a large apartment building. Pete turned with his MG quickly into a side street, stopped, got out and ran back to the street corner. Sigourney stood in front of the building, took a key out of her pocket, unlocked the door and disappeared.

Pete sneaked up to the door and took a look at the doorbell signs. He found her name and went back to his car. So Sigourney had gone home, as he had expected. Jupiter's plan had been to pursue the housekeeper to see if she did anything that could be linked to the mysterious events at the Cartier house. She hadn't done that yet. Pete decided to wait a while longer. He drove his car back to the road and parked at a sheltered spot from where he could keep an eye on the front door. Now it was time to be patient again.

At the same time Bob was hiding near the group of trees where Pete's car had parked earlier. Jupiter was now alone with Mrs Cartier and Bob was supposed to watch if someone approached the house or something else suspicious happened. Fortunately, it was quite warm, so at least he didn't have to freeze while standing idly behind the trees. Every now and then a car drove by or a few people strolled across the street, but that was all. Bob thought of Elizabeth and of the fact that he could have spent the evening more pleasantly. But duty called. At the same time, however, he was quite happy not to be in the house. He was still shaken by the wobbly table and the flying cup, and the horror was still deep in his bones. He had already racked his brains in vain about how to explain what had happened.

Although Jupiter had claimed not to believe in ghosts and spiritual phenomena, after what he had experienced yesterday and today, he was almost ready to change that belief. Of course, he could never admit that as the First Investigator. Jupe would have given himself a long lecture on reasoning and superstition. Perhaps there was something similar was going on in his head.

Bob looked at his watch. It was almost nine and they had agreed to call every half hour by walkie-talkie. Bob decided not to wait a few more minutes and lifted his walkie-talkie he

was carrying. He pressed the transmit button and spoke quietly into the device. "Records to First, come in!"

"Hello, Records. Is there anything new," Jupiter's squeaky voice came through the receiver.

"I'm afraid not. What's with you?" Bob replied.

"Nothing so far. I'm patrolling the whole house, but nothing has happened. Mrs Cartier is in her study. She wants to write some letters before she goes to bed."

"All right, then. Let me know if anything happens," Bob replied.

"Sure, I will. First out."

Bob lowered the walkie-talkie and looked out again to the street and across to the house. Nothing moved. Then he suddenly saw a small, dark shadow scurrying through the front yard of Mrs Cartier's house. But it was only a cat from the neighbourhood that went on a night ramble. Bob relaxed. He wondered if anything was going to happen. Actually, he had little desire to spend the whole night out here. He gave himself another hour and a half to stay there. He'd then ask Jupiter to take over his job—if nothing had happened by then.

But he did not have to wait that long.

Jupiter was alone and took the opportunity to have a good look around all the rooms. Mrs Cartier was in her study, Pete was hopefully following Sigourney, and Bob was guarding the house from the outside. So he could move freely in all rooms. Soon he had convinced himself that there was nobody but Lydia Cartier and him in the house.

He didn't even know what he was looking for. Perhaps there were hidden devices somewhere that could be responsible for the haunting incidents. Maybe there were loudspeakers that faked the eerie noises. Maybe he could find a clue that would take him further. Jupiter had to admit to himself that he had rarely been as helpless as he was now.

The Three Investigators had often dealt with alleged haunting phenomena, but each time they could be explained rationally. But now he was completely at a loss. He still refused to believe that this was the work of a poltergeist. If he was completely honest with himself, however, he had to admit to himself that this firm conviction slowly began to waver. Of course he would not allow himself to admit that in front of Bob and Pete, as he would have lost his reputation as a brilliant mastermind who only trusted his intellect. So he could only hope that the next time something unusual happened, he would be there in time to catch the perpetrator. Then he remembered that only a few hours ago he had sat directly in front of the wobbly table and had not seen a perpetrator. Jupiter wiped the thought aside in anger. He had to pull himself together and think logically or he wouldn't get a result.

Jupiter was in Mrs Cartier's studio looking at her oil paintings when he heard a loud clatter. It came from downstairs. In a flash, he ran out into the hallway and to the stairs. The clattering did not stop, and it was accompanied by a loud crash that sounded as if an entire room was being demolished. Jupiter ran down the stairs, taking three steps at a time, and heard just one last loud rumble as he reached the landing. Then it was quiet.

Undecided, he looked around. Where did the noise come from? Suddenly, he heard a dull throb that sounded like footsteps. It came right out of the wall next to him. Jupiter opened the door closest to him and turned on the light.

It was the storeroom. Stunned, he stared inside. The noise slowly faded and after a loud bang that seemed to come straight out of the wall again, it was quiet.

Jupe took his walkie-talkie he was wearing on his belt and turned it on. "First to Records," he said quietly.

“What is it, First? Did something happen?”

“I think you’d better get over here right now.”

12. Trapped!

Mrs Cartier came down the stairs when Jupiter opened the front door to let Bob in. “What was that? What happened?” she asked. “I heard a terrible clatter right below me.”

“That’s what happened,” Jupiter said, pointing to the opened door to the storeroom. Mrs Cartier and Bob approached the storeroom carefully and peered into it. It was in a complete mess: Brooms and scrubbers had fallen over, metal buckets lay on the floor, a wall shelf had come loose and crashed down with its contents. Canned fruit and puddles of fruit juice slowly spread on the wooden floor. Another shelf, which had previously been leaning against the wall, now stood in the middle of the room.

“Did you see anything?” Bob wanted to know right away.

“No, just heard,” confessed Jupiter. “I was in the studio when I heard this terrible noise.”

“Where were you, Mrs Cartier?” Bob continued.

“In my study. It’s right above us. I only heard the noise, that’s all.”

“Gosh!” Jupiter clenched his fist in anger. “Why am I always in the wrong place at the wrong time!”

“This isn’t your fault,” Bob tried to calm him down.

“Have you noticed anything?” Jupiter grumbled.

Bob shook his head. “Nothing but a cat and a couple of pedestrians.”

Mrs Cartier sighed. “Maybe you have to come to terms with the fact that you can’t watch ghosts,” she said dejectedly. “I’m glad nothing happened to you, but I’m beginning to think you can’t help me. That’s not a reproach, you do your job very well, but with detective work you can’t find out what the poltergeist is like.”

“So you’re really convinced it’s a ghost? Or something like that?” asked Jupiter.

“I don’t have another option. If I can accept that a ghost in my house is up to no good, maybe I would know how to deal with it better.” She entered the storeroom and began to move the shelf back to the right place.

“Leave it alone, Mrs Cartier,” Bob came to her rescue. “We’ll handle it.”

Mrs Cartier smiled, “That’s really very nice of you. I’m very tired and would like to go to bed. I just hope I can fall asleep. Last night, I barely got a wink of sleep.”

Lydia Cartier disappeared upstairs and Bob and Juve started to clear the mess a little. Bob got water to mop up the sticky sauce from the broken jars. “I’m going to wear out slowly,” he said suddenly as he scrubbed the floor with his rag and helped Juve put the shelf back on. “We’ve had plenty of opportunities to investigate, but we still haven’t taken a step forward.”

“I had the same thoughts, too,” Juve admitted.

“Maybe at least Pete will succeed. We have to get some results, otherwise we can forget about this case too. On Monday, Mrs Cartier wants to see some medium or psychic or somebody else, then we’re out of the race.”

“Can’t your super brain come up with a theory?” Bob wanted to know. “You’re usually unbeatable at things like this.”

“I can’t think of anything at the moment. That’s the frustrating thing.” Silently they continued to clean up the storeroom, which was more work than they had thought. When

Jupe had finished tidying up, he helped Bob wipe and sat down on his knees to pick up some broken glass from the floor. Suddenly, his gaze fell to a storage shelf at the bottom.

"Strange," he murmured. "This skirting board here... it looks very different from the other skirting boards in the room."

"So what?" Bob asked. "What's so weird about that again?"

"That it's not a skirting board, it just looks like it," Jupiter countered.

"Aha," Bob said, unimpressed. "And what is it actually?"

"I don't know," Jupiter replied and touched the strip of wood. He tried to pull it away, but it was fixed to the wall. Rather accidentally he pressed against it. Suddenly they heard a soft creak and part of the wood-panelled wall swung back.

"Wow," Bob cried and stared at the door-sized opening that had opened right in front of his eyes. "A secret door! Jupe! You're a genius!"

The First Investigator looked surprised at the dark hole in the wall. "In principle, I agree with you," he said, grinning, "but in this case, it was more of a coincidence that I discovered the mechanism."

"Where do you think the door leads to?" Bob thought and carefully stuck his head through the opening. The light of the chamber did not reach far and so he could see only about two metres into a narrow passage. "Do you think Mrs Cartier knows about this door?"

"We'd better ask her about it tomorrow, she might be asleep by now. I'll get a flashlight, then we'll take a closer look." Jupe left the room and soon returned with a lamp. "You'd better stay outside for safety," he said and disappeared into the opening. The passage led to the right and was completely bare. The walls were made of the same dark stone as the outer wall of the house.

After three metres, the tunnel bent again to the right and ended at a wooden door. "There's a door here," Jupiter called and tried to open it. "But there is no handle, though. Maybe I can just push it open." He tried.

Bob heard him wheeze and the sound echoed eerily from the dark walls. "I can't make it. Give me a hand," gasped Jupiter. "But it's best to put something between the wall and the door so it doesn't slam shut."

Bob looked around, took the broom in the corner and put it in the doorway. Then he followed Jupiter, who stood in the light of the lamp in front of the wooden door.

"Come on, we'll try it together," Jupiter suggested, and together they braced themselves against it. With a jerk the door gave way and was blown open. Behind it was a spiral staircase leading up. "Aha," mumbled Jupiter. "Let's go upstairs, then."

At that moment they heard a buzzing noise, followed by a loud bang. It had got even darker. "The door!" Bob shouted in shock and ran back down the passageway, but he could not see the secret door. He couldn't see it because it was closed.

Jupiter reached him. "You were supposed to put something in between," he said to Bob.

"I did!" Bob defended himself. "But the broom's gone! Well, don't panic, we'll get the door open again." But he was wrong. Even with combined forces, the two could not open the secret door. They also could not find a mechanism like the one on the other side.

"Great," Jupiter said. "Then we'll go the other way." They went back and climbed the spiral staircase, which ended about a floor up with a trap-door in the ceiling. They braced themselves against the hatch, but even it did not move an inch.

"Now what?" Bob asked.

"Now," Jupiter replied, "let's make some noise." They hammered against the hatch and shouted as loudly as they could for help.

“We must be right under Mrs Cartier’s study,” Jupiter said panting in between. “Maybe she can hear us.” But even after two minutes of uninterrupted noise, nothing happened.

“She can’t hear us,” Bob moaned. “The trap-door seems very thick. And the walls too. It’s no use. We’re trapped.”

It was an hour before Sigourney left the house.

Pete had just given up and wanted to drive back when the young woman appeared at the front door. Her blond hair was now untied. She had changed her clothes and no longer looked like a quiet, intimidated wallflower in her chic skirt and dark blazer. Pete almost didn’t recognize her. She got into her car and drove off. Pete followed behind.

The ride went back to the interior of Rocky Beach. In front of Hotel Savoy, Sigourney parked and got out. Pete waited five minutes, then he also left the car and went towards the entrance. He was wondering if he should camouflage himself if Sigourney was still in the lobby. But then he decided to come up with an excuse in case she saw him. He entered the lobby, which was empty except for a young woman behind the reception. Even in the bar next door there were only three people, as Pete noticed with a quick glance. The hotel wasn’t very big. He looked around, Sigourney was nowhere to be found. Pete resolutely approached the lady at the reception.

“Good evening, I’m looking for a friend of mine. She must have just entered the hotel. She’s small and has long blonde hair.”

“Yes, I saw the young woman,” said the lady. “She went to the elevator.”

“Did she say where she was going?” Pete continued.

“No, she seemed to know the way,” was the reply.

“Hmm. Thank you,” he murmured and walked out the entrance. He could have looked for Sigourney, but she had disappeared in one of the rooms to meet someone. So a search wouldn’t have made much sense. Pete thought about what to do now. Maybe Sigourney only visited one acquaintance who was in town, and maybe she stayed hours in the hotel. But maybe her visit to the Savoy has something to do with the haunting.

Pete thought about getting advice from Jupiter via the walkie-talkie. But the device’s range wasn’t far enough so he probably couldn’t reach Bob and Jupiter from there. He looked at his watch. It was almost eleven. Pete decided to wait in front of the hotel until midnight. If Sigourney hadn’t come out by then, he’d go back to Mrs Cartier’s house. He got into his car and wondered whether his friends were doing such a boring job as his. He tried the walkie-talkie. As expected, it remained silent.

13. Brain Cell Gymnastics

The darkness was perfect, and the silence too. Only the even breaths of the other could be heard. Jupiter felt anxious. Actually he wasn't afraid of the dark, but this was really absolute blackness, he could not even see his hand in front of his eyes. Sure, they still had the lamp, but Jupiter thought it was better to turn it off until they really needed it because of the batteries. Now he almost regretted his decision. A little light would've done him good now.

Little by little he forgot the dimensions of the room—he no longer knew whether the wall was right next to him or whether there were still ten metres of air in between. Or a hundred. He scared those frightening thoughts away and turned to Bob, who was sitting next to him on the stairs. “And you're really sure you put a broom to stop the door closing?”

“Yes, I'm sure, one hundred percent sure. Somebody must have taken it away and slammed the door shut. Unfortunately, it only opens from the outside, just like the stupid trap-door above us.”

“But who would have taken the broom away? There was nobody in the house.”

“Except Mrs Cartier. Maybe it was her and she wanted to scare us a little bit.” Bob laughed quietly, even though he didn't feel like laughing at all.

“I've thought of that before,” Jupiter said seriously.

“I'm afraid I can't see your face,” Bob said. “Can you tell me if you're smiling right now?”

“I'm not grinning. I'm totally serious about this,” Jupiter replied.

“So you think Mrs Cartier's behind all this?” Bob asked.

“It's just a guess. But it seems unlikely at the moment.”

“You're crazy,” Bob said. “Why would she lock us up here?”

“I don't know, I don't know. But who else could it have been? There's nobody in the house,” Jupiter replied.

“And what would you say,” Bob began hesitantly, “if it really was a ghost?”

“Don't start that again,” Jupiter admonished him. “You know how I feel about that.”

“Do you have a better explanation then?” Bob asked.

“Not quite yet. But we can try to find one,” suggested the First Investigator. “Too bad we don't have anything to write on, otherwise we could write down the facts and sort them out.”

“We can't see anything anyway,” Bob said. “Besides, I don't feel like guessing. I want to get out of here first.”

“But we've already tried everything,” Jupiter said. “We can neither open the doors nor smash them in. And no one can hear us either, so we must wait for someone to set us free.”

“And who's that supposed to be?”

“Either Pete or Mrs Cartier,” Jupiter replied.

“And how could they find us here?” Bob asked doubtfully.

“We'll make more noise,” Jupiter suggested. “Mrs Cartier probably didn't hear us because she's asleep or she is at the other end of the house. But tomorrow morning at the latest, she'll go into her study and then she'll hear us. Besides, we have the walkie-talkies. Me anyway.” He tapped on his belt to convince himself that the device was still there.

"I've agreed with Pete that instead of ringing the doorbell, he'll use the walkie-talkie when he gets back from his pursuit. Through the thick walls he has to stand directly in front of the house to contact us, but that's enough. We can get him to come here. I just hope he gets back soon. But until then, we can use the time to figure out some theories."

"Well, you got a lot of nerve," Bob grumbled. "We're trapped by the poltergeist and you're practising brain cell gymnastics again."

Jupiter did not respond to that remark. "We have to think about what exactly has happened so far and who or what might have been responsible for it. Let's just take the incidents we've witnessed. First, there's the rumbling noise from the study when we were having tea with Mrs Cartier. Apparently the chest has been moved. That could easily have been Sigourney."

"That's right," Bob said. "But what about the spook in Mrs Cartier's bedroom last night? I'm sure it wasn't Sigourney. Or do you think she could climb up the house wall and destroy the bedroom, always in danger of being discovered by Mrs Cartier? After all, she was right in the bedroom and only turned on the lights a bit too late."

"That's not impossible either. She is quite small and wiry and could make a good climber if you imagine her in different clothes. She could also have donned a mask," Jupiter suggested.

"Then why would she take Mrs Cartier's bedroom apart of all places? To do something spooky, she could have a hundred other possibilities, especially when she knows her way around the house," Bob thought.

"That's right. So at least in this case, let's assume it wasn't Sigourney. Then it could still be Mrs Cartier herself," Jupiter said.

"Theoretically, yes. But why would she turn her own bedroom into a battlefield? That doesn't make any sense," answered Bob.

"She's probably lonely and wants people around her, so she's staging this haunting story," Jupiter surmised.

Bob would have liked to give his friend a reproachful look now, but it was pitch-black. So he tried to put his disapproval in his voice. "This is really a little flimsy. First, Mrs Cartier doesn't give me the impression of being a lonely old woman. Second, she would have to be a very good actress to be able to portray her horrific responses so skilfully, and third, that doesn't explain the case of the chest moving. After all, she was there with us."

"It was just a theory," Jupe defended himself. "Let's get on with it. What about this afternoon? The wobbly table?"

"There's no question of Sigourney or Mrs Cartier," Bob said. "After all, they were both there."

"Yes, but Sigourney had just entered the dining room," Jupiter said. "Maybe her presence had something to do with it."

"What is it?" Bob wanted to know.

"I don't know," Jupiter replied.

Bob continued: "And what about that flying cup that almost smashed on your thick skull. Sigourney was right next to us and Mrs Cartier was in another room. Then there's the devastated storeroom and the fact that we're trapped here now. Here, too, the two are out of the question. So it must have been an intruder after all... Or a ghost."

"But I searched the whole house just before I heard the noise in the storeroom. There's no intruder in the house. And no ghost either," said Jupiter.

"Great," Bob sighed. "Then we have four possible suspects: Sigourney, Mrs Cartier, an intruder and a ghost. And all four are very unlikely. So we're back to square one."

Jupiter had nothing more to say about that. He was sure that he was only missing one tiny piece of information or that he had overlooked something important. But he couldn't figure out what it was. While he was still thinking, he suddenly heard a soft, throbbing sound. He looked up, but in front of him was still absolute blackness. "Did you hear that?" he whispered to Bob.

Bob nodded, but then he remembered that Jupe couldn't see that. "Yes," he whispered back. "What is that?"

They listened and the throbbing repeated itself. "There's someone," Jupiter suspected. "Come on, let's make another noise."

They climbed up the stairs, and hammered against the wooden trap-door above them and shouted as loudly as they could. Then they kept silent and listened hard.

The sound was louder this time. Again they hammered against the trap-door and suddenly there was a loud pounding right above them.

Startled, they retreated. "Hello?" called Jupiter, but no one answered. Instead, it kept pounding.

"Jupe!" Bob whispered. "That's neither Pete nor Mrs Cartier. That's..." the loud pounding interrupted him, "That's... the poltergeist!"

Suddenly it was quiet. Jupe and Bob held their breath. It had stopped. They waited. It took a minute for Bob to breathe out. At that very moment, the throbbing sounded right next to him. Bob jumped. The noise was as loud as if it came from the wall itself. It echoed eerily in their stone prison. "Turn on the light!" Bob asked, suddenly remembered that they had a lamp.

The First Investigator liked nothing better than that. He switched on the lamp, which dazzled him at first, but then the light calmed him down immensely. It lit up the walls. There was nothing to see, even though the throbbing stopped. He saw Bob's chalky-white face, and he probably didn't look any better himself. "I want to get out of here," he heard Bob say.

"Me too." As if on command, the two of them ran down the stairs. They threw themselves against the door with all their might.

It held on. Nevertheless, they tried again. At least they didn't have to hear that horrifying throb anymore.

"Damn!" Bob gasped after a while. "It's no use!" He listened. The noises had stopped. But Bob did not trust that the silence would last.

He looked over at Jupe, who looked pretty upset. "Maybe it is a ghost after all," mumbled the First Investigator. "Who or what else could make noises coming straight out of the wall?"

Bob looked at him, surprised. "Jupe! What happened to your ironclad principles?"

"I don't care about them now. Maybe the ghost just wants to convince me that he exists using his mischievous tricks. Then maybe he will leave us alone. Okay, that's why I believe in it—as long as we get out of here."

At that moment, they heard a strange noise. Then a voice sounded right next to Jupe.

He immediately spun around.

14. A Flash of the Poltergeist

Pete got tired of waiting. It was just before midnight and he wondered if he should leave. In those few minutes, nothing would probably happen anyway. Then he suddenly saw Sigourney coming out of the hotel entrance. She quickly walked up to her parked car, got in and drove off.

Pete hoped the woman at reception had not told Sigourney he had been there. He started his MG again pursued Sigourney through Rocky Beach. Soon he realized where she was going—back home. True enough, she parked in front of her house, got out and disappeared through the door.

“Great,” buzzed Pete. “She met with a friend at the hotel and went home. Jupe will be thrilled with this very fruitful shadowing.”

Angry to have spent Saturday night waiting in vain, he drove back to Mrs Cartier’s house. A glance at his fuel gauge made him even more angry. Now he was running out of petrol, and his cash register had been in a constant state for quite some time.

When he had reached Lydia Cartier’s large dark house, he got out and picked up his walkie-talkie. He turned on the device and spoke into the microphone: “Second to First and Records, come in!”

“The walkie-talkie,” Jupiter exclaimed, relieved when he had noticed that a faint voice had come from the speaker of his walkie-talkie. “Finally! I was beginning to think...” He kept what he thought to himself and pulled out the walkie-talkie. “First to Second, at last! We were afraid you’d never come back. We’re in trouble.”

“What happened?” Pete wanted to know.

“We have discovered a secret passage and are now trapped in it. You have to get us out of here!”

“Secret passage? Where?”

“Go inside first,” Jupiter said. “Then we’ll explain everything to you. But I don’t think it’s any use ringing the bell. Mrs Cartier didn’t hear us, so she won’t hear you. Either she sleeps deeply and firmly, has cotton wool in her ears or she simply doesn’t want to hear us. Did you bring your black case?”

“Always!” sounded it from the speaker. They were referring to Pete’s lock picks.

“Then go through the garden and try to crack the back door,” Jupiter instructed.

“All right. See you later.”

Bob breathed a sigh of relief. “Well, it’s about time,” he thought. “Do you think Pete will make it?”

“Have you ever seen him fail?” Jupiter replied.

It took a while, then Pete’s voice sounded again from the walkie-talkie. “I’m inside. Where are you?”

“In the storeroom,” Jupiter explained. “Or behind it.”

Pete rushed straight to the storeroom. “Where are you?,” he said.

Jupe and Bob heard the voice of the Second Investigator through the thick wall near the secret door. “Here!” called Jupe and Bob at the same time as they hammered against the door.

“On the right wall, under the shelf, there’s a strange-looking skirting. You have to press against it!”

A moment later the door swung inwards and Jupiter and Bob were released. “Finally!” Bob moaned. “Thank goodness Pete, you came in time!” They climbed out of the secret passage and took a deep breath.

Pete just looked at both of them with astonishment. “How did you get in there anyway? And what is that, anyway?”

“A secret passage?” Jupiter replied. Curious, Pete put his head through the opening.

“Leave it alone,” Jupiter warned. “Or the poltergeist will lock you up too.”

They sat down in the guest room and told each other what they had experienced. Pete listened in amazement and was secretly very happy to have been on the road. He did not know how he would have behaved in this situation. “Do you think we should wake Mrs Cartier and tell her?” he asked after they finished.

“I think not,” Jupiter replied. “If she is sleeping peacefully, then that’s not necessary. Or if she was the one who locked us up, then maybe we shouldn’t tell her what happened. She’d be amazed tomorrow if we had nothing to tell her.”

“If you say so,” Pete said. “But what are we doing tonight? We’re not getting anywhere here, and I don’t know what else we can do. We don’t even have a lead to follow.”

“Honestly, I’m done,” Bob said. “The last night was already very short for us and the hours in the dark secret passage have really taken a heavy toll on me. I wouldn’t mind if we let the ghost be. I just can’t do it anymore.”

Jupiter nodded. “I must agree with you. If something happens, we’ll probably wake up anyway. And right now, my thinking machine has a few dysfunctions.”

“I’ll have to mark today red in my calendar,” Pete sneered. “Dysfunctions in Jupiter’s brain.”

Jupiter made a grimace. “But before we lie down, we can have another look around Mrs Cartier’s study. I’d at least like to know where the secret stairs lead to.”

They went quietly upstairs, entered the room and looked around. Bob was determined to go to the heavy wooden chest. “Give me a hand,” he said. “I don’t want to make too much noise.” They lifted the crate and carried it to the side. Underneath was normal wooden flooring, but when they took a closer look, they discovered barely noticeable grooves in the wood, which turned out to be a boundary of a trap-door. But there was no handle to lift the door.

“There must be a hidden mechanism, similar to the one in the storeroom,” Bob suspected. “Take a look around.” They kicked the wooden slats, but nothing happened. Then they tried other possibilities, pressed against the wooden panels on the wall, examined the stucco ceiling and took a close look at the many bookshelves. Bob then lifted the large board showing the family tree of the Cartier family from the wall behind the desk.

“Aha!” he shouted. Under the board there was a panel that protruded a little. He pressed on it and without a sound, the trap-door swung open upwards. “Well hidden. But not good enough for The Three Investigators, of course,” he grinned.

“So it’s clear that someone might have gone down from the study to the storeroom to create chaos without me noticing,” Jupiter said. “Mrs Cartier was in the study when the storeroom was ravaged. But, of course, that’s not proof that she did it. Maybe there are more secret passages around this house. Tomorrow we should search every room for similar mechanisms that allows an intruder to move around the house without us noticing. But there’s time tomorrow.” He yawned.

"I'm ready for bed." Jupiter went to the trap-door and closed it again. Then he hung the board with the family tree back on the wall. He took a quick look at it and frowned for a moment. But when he realized that the other two had already left the room, he quickly followed them.

Jupiter was awakened rudely. Someone shook him. He opened his eyes and saw Pete's face. He seemed excited.

"Jupe!" he whispered. "Wake up! The noises have started again!" Suddenly Jupiter was wide awake. Now he heard it too. A muffled knocking boomed out of the walls. He straightened up. Bob was already awake and standing next to the bed. Both were already dressed, which surprised Jupiter, but he had no opportunity to ask.

At that moment a huge bang shook the house, so loud that the ground trembled. Jupiter swung out of bed.

"Where did that come from?" he asked, but the other two were equally at a loss.

"From everywhere," Pete whispered. Again the whole house trembled and the rumbling continued rhythmically. "The poltergeist seems pretty pissed off."

"Go!" Jupiter decided. "We need to find out where the sound comes from!" He walked resolutely towards the door, opened it and was about to step out when the door slammed back shut in front of his nose. He shook the door handle. The door could not be opened.

"Hey!" he shouted. "What are you doing? Pete, Bob, help me!" The two ran over and together they threw themselves against the door. It didn't budge.

Instinctively, Pete reached for his lock picks and tampered with the lock. After a few tries he said, astonished: "The door is not locked at all! It just won't open!"

"The window!" Bob decided and wanted to walk across the room. Suddenly one of the beds moved by itself and slid under the window at lightning speed. He seemed to freeze with terror. "What..." he began. At that moment a picture fell from the wall, the glass of the frame shattered into a thousand pieces. The other bed set itself in motion and headed straight for him, as if it was being pushed by someone.

Bob screamed and jumped to the side to escape the attacking bed. It crashed onto the wall.

"Bob!" called Jupiter. "What's that?" The shards of glass from the broken picture frame moved as if they were alive, and two pieces rose into the air and shot at Jupiter. He could just throw himself to the ground so he wouldn't get struck by them. When he looked up again, the whole room's furniture was swirling through the air. The third bed turned like a spinning top on the floor. Bob and Pete screamed and ran wildly through the whole room fleeing from the furniture.

The third bed? It suddenly shot through Jupiter's head. But there were only two beds in this room! "Jupe!" called a familiar voice. It was Aunt Mathilda. She was stuck to the ceiling and waved to him. Jupiter's thoughts skipped. Three beds? Flying furniture? Aunt Mathilda?

That had to...

"... to be a dream," he murmured and woke up. He opened his eyes and found himself on the floor. Had he fallen out of bed? But then he remembered that Bob and Pete had taken the beds and he had to sleep on the floor. Yes, there were only two beds, he realized with satisfaction.

And Aunt Mathilda was not on the ceiling. He breathed a sigh of relief and looked out the window. A bright, round moon shone in. "Full moon," Jupiter mumbled and scratched his head. "No wonder."

“What?” a sleepy voice came out of bed. It was Pete. “Did you say something?”
“No. Go back to sleep.”

15. Jupe Spots a Decisive Clue

The next morning, they sat together having breakfast with Mrs Cartier. Sigourney brought in the tea.

"I was so tired last night," said Lydia Cartier, "I put extra cotton wool in my ears and took sleeping medication so that I could finally get a good night's sleep. I didn't notice anything around me either. Did something happen to you?"

Jupe shook his head. "It was a quiet night." He looked Mrs Cartier sharply in the eye and thought he saw a little insecurity in it, but he could have been wrong. "But we've discovered something. While tidying up the storeroom, we happened to find a secret door leading to your study. Did you know about this?"

Mrs Cartier was surprised for a moment. "The secret passage! Of course, I haven't thought of that in years!"

She then recalled: "When my husband bought this house, he had it renovated from top to bottom. He discovered that the outer wall was extremely thick and decided to build a secret passage. I never quite understood why he did that, but he said that for him, it was the realisation of a childhood dream. But we never used it, so it was forgotten."

Jupiter nodded. "We found it by chance. There's a very sophisticated system behind it, you can't open both doors from the inside." Again he watched Mrs Cartier closely, but she either had nothing to hide or she didn't let on.

"Right," she remembered. "The trap-door can only be opened from the study, the lower door from both the storeroom and the study."

"We hadn't even noticed," Jupiter said. "So you can go from top to bottom, but not the other way around." Mrs Cartier nodded.

"Are there any other secret passages in the house? Or hidden doors?" Jupiter continued asking.

"No," she smiled. "At least not that I know of." Then she got serious again. "So you couldn't find anything out?" she asked. "You were talking last night about special measures you wanted to take."

Jupiter shook his head regretfully. "I'm afraid not. But we still have some theories to discuss. Maybe we'll drop by again this afternoon."

Mrs Cartier nodded. "As you wish. But tomorrow I'm going to turn to someone who has experience with the supernatural. Please don't be angry with me, but it can't go on like this."

After breakfast, The Three Investigators said goodbye to Mrs Cartier and drove to Headquarters.

"I guess we're probably be out of this case too," Pete muttered dejectedly. "We haven't made a single step forward."

"I wouldn't say that," Jupiter disagreed. "I'm pretty sure Mrs Cartier has something to hide. Have you noticed how important it was to her to tell us how deeply she slept last night? It is as if she wanted to justify not hearing our calling and knocking when we were locked up, even though she knew nothing about it."

"That's right," Bob said. "Besides that, did you notice that she asked a strange question? She said, 'Did something happen to you?' as if she had already known that something had

happened, otherwise she would have asked the question differently. Unfortunately, that's not proof. We don't even have a theory to prove. We are completely in the dark. The theory that Mrs Cartier was only looking for attention can't be right either. Otherwise, she wouldn't have released us so quickly."

Jupiter nodded. "That's the tricky part. But there's something wrong, I'm sure of it."

"Oh, you don't say!" Pete said. "I also think it's pretty wrong when a house is haunted. Anyway, I have to go home now. My mother will complain anyway because she hasn't seen me for two days now. Not to mention Kelly."

"Is she still mad about Aunt Elenor?" Bob wanted to know.

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "She'll settle down again. Well, I'm off, then. Call me if there's anything new."

Soon Bob also said goodbye. He still had to catch up for his geography exam. Jupiter remained alone in the still untidy Headquarters and continued to pinch his lower lip.

Something was gnawing at his subconscious all the time.

Something was wrong. Since last night, he had the feeling that he was missing something important. He had received a decisive clue that had now buried somewhere in his memory. Jupiter didn't know where to look for that clue.

There was a knock on the door. Aunt Mathilda came in. "Hello, Jupe. Nice to see you again. Are you working on another exciting case or why are you always on the go?"

Jupiter nodded. "That's how it is. And it's very tricky again."

"If you have any questions, you can turn to me with confidence," she smiled. "Today, by the way, I got a nice call. Hope, an old friend of mine, contacted me again after a long time! She spent a year in Europe and worked there, in France. Next week she wants to visit me."

"How beautiful," Jupiter mumbled absent-mindedly. Then suddenly he looked up. "What did you say?" He gave a reproachful look.

"When you're lost in thought, the world can end and you wouldn't know it, would you? I said that Hope called me and..."

"She was in France?" Jupe interrupted his aunt. She just nodded silently. Jupe jumped up. He walked up to his aunt and gave her a big smack on the cheek. "Aunt Mathilda, you're a genius!" he said and pushed past her. "I have to leave now!" he shouted to her, then he was already on his bike, swung around and rode off. Aunt Mathilda looked at him in amazement and shook her head slowly.

Jupiter cycled like a man possessed. He could have called Bob or Pete, but he wanted to check his suspicions first. He could have asked Uncle Titus to lend him his truck, but it took him too long. It was a long way to Mrs Cartier's house, but a little exercise couldn't hurt him—he should really do more for his condition. He was glad that Pete and Bob didn't see him now, as they would only tease him about his lack of physical abilities.

Panting and sweating wet, he finally arrived at Mrs Cartier's house. He rang the bell and a moment later Sigourney opened the door. She looked surprised. "Yes?" she asked.

"I thought of something," Jupiter said quickly. "I'd like to have another quick look around Mrs Cartier's study."

"Mrs Cartier is in bed now," Sigourney replied. Strange, Jupiter thought, since she supposedly slept all night long.

"I'm sure she won't mind," he said curtly, pushing his way past Sigourney into the house. Without waiting for a reply, he went up the stairs. The study was what they had left the night before. Jupiter walked up behind the desk and looked at the family tree that hid the secret opening mechanism for the trap-door. He studied the family tree for a moment, mumbled a

short “yes” and left the room. Sigourney met him when he already went down again. “What...” she began.

“That’s it,” Jupiter interrupted her and left the house as fast as he had come. For the second time that day, someone looked at him shaking his head. He got on his bike and rode back home.

Arriving at Headquarters, he sat at the phone, grabbed the phone book and searched for the number of Hotel Savoy where Pete had been waiting for Sigourney the past night. He dialled the number and waited.

“Hotel Savoy?” a friendly voice came in.

“Hello, I’d like to enquire about a guest in your hotel,” Jupiter said. Then he gave a name.

A moment later the voice replied: “Yes, the gentleman is currently staying here. Shall I put you through to him?”

“Not necessary,” Jupiter replied. “Please don’t tell him someone called for him, either. It’s supposed to be a surprise.” He hung up and immediately jumped up again to go over to the house where he lived with his aunt and uncle. Now he had to ask Uncle Titus for the truck. Malibu was too far for him to cycle to, especially in the heat. He had to pay Aunt Elenor a visit.

16. The Circle Closes

“Bob Andrews,” Bob answered the phone.

“Hi, Bob, it’s Jupe. What do you say you drop by this afternoon? Aunt Mathilda has a great cherry pie for us.”

Bob thought for a moment. “Actually, I still have to study for the geography exam. And Elizabeth will be right over.”

“Just bring her along. There is not only cherry pie, but also something else,” Jupiter promised.

“What is it?” Bob wanted to know.

“An almost solved case,” Jupiter replied mysteriously. “And this will interest Elizabeth, too.”

“We’re already on our way,” Bob said quickly. Jupiter had spoken in a tone that promised that it would be exciting.

Jupe, Lys and Pete were already sitting on the Jones porch when Elizabeth and Bob arrived. Pete was just telling that Kelly was still mad at him and had claimed to have no time on the phone.

Aunt Mathilda’s cherry pie was fantastic as always and they first went at it.

“What’s so important now?” Bob had hoped that Jupiter started telling them something, and now he was almost bursting with curiosity. “What did you mean about the case being almost solved?”

“Anybody else want some orange juice?” Jupiter avoided the question.

“Jupe!” Pete admonished him. “You know it drives us all crazy to play this game.”

“What game?” the First Investigator asked hypocritically.

“This I’ll-tease-you-a-bit-more-so-you’ll-be-grateful-when-I-finally-tell-you game,” Pete said irritably. “Come on, tell us!”

Jupiter reached over the table and took another piece of the pie. Then suddenly the table wobbled and Jupiter stared at the trembling table.

Pete took a quick look under the table. “Very funny,” he said when he discovered that Jupiter caused the movement with his knees clamped to one of the legs of the table. “What are you trying to do, scare us?”

“Not at all,” Jupiter replied. “I just want to present to you the solution to Riddle Number One.” As if to emphasize his words, he let the table wobble again.

Bob too looked at him blankly. “What are you trying to tell us?” he asked.

“Very simple,” Jupiter claimed. “One of our many questions in the poltergeist case was how the table in Mrs Cartier’s house could suddenly wobble. And that was the answer.”

“You can’t be serious,” Pete said. “You mean, you wiggled the table? With your legs?”

“Not me!” Jupiter disagreed, frowning at the Second Investigator. “Mrs Cartier! She wobbled the table!”

Bob laughed. “Is this some kind of joke?”

“Not at all. It’s actually quite logical. It’s easy to make a table wobble with a bit of practice. It just didn’t occur to us because none of us suspected Mrs Cartier at first. It would have been illogical because she gave us the assignment to investigate the mysterious

incidents in her house. So the solution was right in front of us, but we didn't see it because we didn't even consider it. The haunting was not done by a spook or poltergeist. Instead, it was a silly prank. There is nothing supernatural at all."

"And..." Pete said, not very convinced. "What makes you think that? And what about the other incidents?"

"They're just as easy to explain," Jupiter said. "The mess in Mrs Cartier's bedroom was done by herself. She pulled the key out of the lock, ravaged the furniture loudly and shouted, so we thought she was scared to death. She played out her distress to perfection.

"She also messed up the storeroom by using the secret passage from the study and then quickly crept back upstairs. She also trapped me and Bob in the secret passage."

"And what about the chest that was pushed back and forth?" Bob wanted to know. "That couldn't have been Mrs Cartier. She was in the living room with us after all."

"That's right. That was done by her accomplice, Sigourney," Jupiter replied unmoved.

Now Pete laughed. "You really mean that, don't you? Lydia Cartier and her housekeeper Sigourney are accomplices? They're in cahoots? Why, I ask you. Wait, no, before you answer, please explain to me quickly how they got the cup to fly across the room?"

"I'm afraid I don't know that yet," confessed Jupiter. "But I'm sure that was a very simple trick, too."

"Well, well, a trick," said Pete. "Well, why don't you explain to us what's that all for? If Mrs Cartier and Sigourney are working together, surely you know what they're working on, don't you? I mean, what's the motive? Oh, motive, we don't even have a crime, just some furniture that was supposedly pushed back and forth..."

"But now I am also curious too," Lys interrupted in a somewhat more conciliatory tone. She found it unfair that Pete questioned Juve in such a way, but on the other hand she found Juve's allegations were very doubtful so far.

"The motive is about us," Jupiter confidently proclaimed. "It was not about any hauntings at all. Not even Mrs Cartier's need for recognition. It was about us. Lydia Cartier and Sigourney put in a lot of effort giving us a case that we couldn't possibly refuse and that tied us up so we couldn't think of anything else."

"And why?" Pete wanted to know. "To our—" he paused and pondered a moment, "to test our criminological abilities?"

"No. To distract us. That was the motive!" Jupiter replied confidently.

"Distract us? From what?" Bob wanted to know, as he was very confused as with the others.

"From our other case—Aunt Elenor's amulet," Jupiter said, surprising everyone.

"Now you're completely out of your mind," said Pete. "Did you get crazy from last night when you were trapped in the secret passage? Aunt Elenor's amulet, huh? We haven't found it and Mrs Cartier wanted to distract us for that?"

"The amulet is not important," Jupiter explained. "What I mean is that we were not supposed to find or notice something else."

"Find or notice something else?" Bob asked. Now everyone looked at Jupiter expectantly. He greatly enjoyed this moment and hesitated for a few seconds before he answered.

"The Green Iron Woman. The picture hanging in Aunt Elenor's hallway. It's not a print, it's the original. It's the painting that was stolen a week ago at the Rocky Beach Art Gallery Hall."

"What?" everyone shouted at once.

"What makes you say that?" Elizabeth asked.

"I looked at it. I was there today. I went to Aunt Elenor's house under the pretext that I thought I knew where the amulet was, and I took another close look at the picture. It's hard to see under the glass, but if you look closely, you see that it's not a print, it's the original."

"Oh, I see. So Aunt Elenor is an art thief and stole the Green Iron Woman and hung it up at her house. Then she noticed that her amulet had disappeared, and she hired us to look for it. Then she noticed that we might notice that she has the real Green Iron Woman at home, and she told her old friend Lydia Cartier to come up with something exciting to distract us," Pete said sarcastically. "Jupe, I appreciate your intellectual ability, but this time you're really talking complete nonsense!"

"I'm not finished yet," Jupiter replied, somewhat offended.

"Of course, Aunt Elenor is not the thief. I'd rather guess her lodger, Ethan Easton is. I still don't know exactly why the picture was hung in the hallway visible to everyone, but Mr Easton wanted us out of the house and so, through Lydia Cartier, he made the poltergeist story."

"How on earth did you come up with that?" Bob looked at the First Investigator with anticipation.

"Aunt Mathilda had a part in it," Jupe explained. "She told me today that an old friend who had lived in France for sometime wanted to visit her. It reminded me that Lydia Cartier's family came from France. And then I had a brainstorm. Finally I remembered what had been bothering me the whole time. I had taken a look at her family tree which hangs in her study, and it seemed a little strange to me. I just didn't know what it was. So I went back to her house today and took a closer look at the family tree. And I came across a name that opened my eyes." Again he paused for a while to enjoy the tension for a moment. He had always had a weakness for theatrical performances. Finally he said, "Victor Hugenay."

"Hugenay?" Pete asked without understanding. Then his face suddenly brightened. "Hugenay!" he shouted. "You mean Hugenay?"

"Exactly," Jupiter said and leaned back satisfied.

Now the penny dropped for his colleagues.

"Hey!" Lys exclaimed. "Could you please enlighten Elizabeth and me? We don't know who that is. Who's Victor Hugenay?"

"A sort of an old acquaintance of ours," Bob explained. "Years ago, we had a case about a missing parrot. It was one of our first cases. It was about a stolen painting. Hugenay was our opponent. He was an art thief who was involved in many major thefts, especially in Europe. But he escaped back then."

"Some time later we had to deal with him again. That was when we had a case about a strange alarm clock and again it was about stolen paintings. And although we knew Hugenay was behind it, we couldn't prove anything. He almost never commits the thefts himself, but everyone knew that he was the mastermind. However, the police could not find anything against him so they had to let him go. For us, those were times when a thief and a fraud escaped."

"That's right, Bob. And I remember exactly what Hugenay said to us back then. He said he had enjoyed working with us—although he was more likely to go against us. He was also sure that we would meet again. Well, he probably kept that promise now," Jupiter said.

"I can't believe it," Pete cried, completely out of his mind. "Let me see whether I am getting this right. So Hugenay stole or had someone steal the Green Iron Woman and by chance we came to the house—that was Aunt Elenor's house—where the painting was kept. Hugenay must have heard about it and since he knows what smart guys we are," he grinned broadly, "he got someone to distract us away with a case we couldn't refuse."

“That’s right. And that someone was his aunt,” Jupiter said.

“What?” Bob asked, amazed. “Lydia Cartier is Hugenay’s aunt?”

“At least if you believe her family tree chart,” Jupiter replied. “Also, remember Mrs Cartier said she was recommended to us by an old friend, Mrs Smith? Mrs Smith was involved in the alarm clock case which, as Bob mentioned earlier, was about stolen paintings! If we’d been a little observant, we could have smelled a rat and made a connection.”

“Don’t exaggerate, Jupe,” Pete said. “I never would have smelled that rat in my life,” he admitted openly, “even if I’d been given a thousand tips.” He patted his friend on the back. “Nevertheless, Mr First Investigator, that was a masterstroke!”

“What are we going to do now?” Bob asked. “Are we going to the police? Or are we going to track down Hugenay? Or what?”

“I’ve already located Hugenay,” Jupiter said casually, followed by a deliberate pause. “He’s in Rocky Beach right now, staying at Hotel Savoy.”

Immediately, Pete’s jaw dropped. “Hotel Savoy? But I was there yesterday! Then Sigourney met with Hugenay!”

“Exactly, probably to report to him that we’ve still made no progress. But that’s changed now,” said Jupiter. “I suspect that he is arranging to pick up the Green Iron Woman soon because Lydia Cartier has relieved us of the case—using the excuse of calling in a medium.”

“Well, well, well. Then what are we waiting for?” Bob asked. “We have to go!”

“Isn’t that too dangerous?” Elizabeth interjected. “You can’t just confront that Hugenay! After all, he is a dangerous criminal.”

But Bob shook his head. “A criminal maybe, but he’s actually a gentleman. I believe he wouldn’t go as far as to hurt us—at least, that’s my impression of him in our previous encounters. His speciality is art theft, nothing more,” he added but with a slight doubt in his voice.

“Well, are we leaving right now?” Pete asked, enterprisingly, and got up.

“Not so fast,” Jupiter admonished him. “If we rush things now, we can still mess this whole thing up. We need to think carefully about what we do next. But we have one decisive advantage: Neither Mrs Cartier nor Hugenay have any idea that we know.”

17. An Old Acquaintance

“Hello, Chief Reynolds, this is Jupiter.” The Three Investigators were sitting at Headquarters, surrounding the phone with the loudspeaker on.

“Jupiter Jones!” the Police Chief’s voice came out loud. “I didn’t expect to hear your voice first thing back from vacation.”

“Sorry to call you at home. I’m glad you’re back from your vacation. I understand that you will be back to work tomorrow but I have one small but urgent request,” Jupiter said.

“What’s it all about this time? How many cases did you solve while I was fishing at Lake Tahoe?” Reynolds asked.

“Amazingly, only one,” Jupiter said immodestly. With Chief Reynolds he could say it in that tone, as he had become more like a friend to him. “But it’s pretty urgent. You may have heard of the painting that was stolen last week at the Art Gallery Hall?”

“Yes, I did.”

“We know where it is. I could have told your colleague, Inspector Kershaw, but he would not believe us. If you could see to it that the Green Iron Woman is seized...”

“The who?” interrupted Chief Reynolds.

“The Green Iron Woman—that’s the painting that was stolen. I’d be very grateful if you could arrange for your officers to follow up,” Jupiter gave the address of Elenor Madigan and the location of the painting. “However the house owner, Miss Madigan is innocent, the offender is probably her lodger, Mr Ethan Easton.”

“If you know all this, you can probably tell me where the painting is,” said Reynolds.

“Yes, I can. It is hanging on the wall in the hall,” Jupiter replied.

For a while there was silence at the other end. “I’d like you to tell me the whole story, Jupiter.”

“Yes, sir, but now we have an urgent appointment,” replied Jupiter.

Reynolds sighed.

“Here we are.” Pete stopped the car in front of Hotel Savoy. “Do you have your equipment?” Jupe and Bob nodded. “Let’s go!”

They got out and entered the hotel. At the reception they asked for Mr Victor Hugenay’s room number.

“Mr Hugenay is staying in Room 105,” a friendly gentleman said. “Shall I call him?” He reached out for the phone.

“Not necessary,” Jupiter said quickly. “It’s a surprise.”

“I see,” the man replied, pointing to the elevator.

The Three Investigators entered the elevator and pressed the button for the first floor.

“I’m pretty nervous,” said Pete. “Can we recognize him?”

“The question is whether he recognizes us,” Jupiter replied.

“I hope this works.” Pete said, concerned.

“What could happen? We are well prepared,” said Jupiter. The elevator door opened and they got out. Room 105 was nearby. Jupiter took a deep breath and knocked.

“Yes?” a voice came from inside.

“Room service!” Jupiter exclaimed in a disguised voice, although he could hardly imagine Hugenay recognizing him by his voice after such a long time.

“I didn’t order anything,” it came out of the room with a light French accent.

“I believe you do, sir,” Jupiter replied. It took a while, then the door was opened. Quickly Jupiter forced the door wide and The Three Investigators stormed together into the room and slammed the door shut. A completely surprised Mr Hugenay stood before them. He hadn’t changed much. The dark hair was still combed back and he still had his little black moustache and was remarkably well dressed.

“Jupiter, Pete and Bob,” he said in astonishment. “So you found me after all.”

“That’s right, Mr Hugenay. Good to see you again.” Jupiter meant that quite honestly, because although he was confronted with a criminal, the man was sympathetic to him.

Jupiter was fascinated by this man’s ingenuity with which, for years, he had managed to escape the police again and again and to slip through the meshes of the law. But this had to end sometime.

“The pleasure is all mine,” said Hugenay with his French accent. “What do you want from me?”

“You know that perfectly well,” said Pete, not liking the man. “They tricked us. But we’ve found out all about you. Jupe, over to you.”

“Congratulations,” said Hugenay. He had grasped the situation quickly but did not seem at least worried.

“We’d like to talk to you before the police show up here,” Jupiter said. “We have a few questions.”

“Oh? Haven’t you been able to solve all the puzzles yourself, Jupiter?” Hugenay asked amusedly.

“Not all, I admit,” replied the First Investigator. “For example, I’d like to know why the Green Iron Woman you stole is hanging on Elenor Madigan’s wall and not hidden anywhere else.”

“I didn’t steal the Green Iron Woman,” Hugenay asserted.

“Of course you did,” Bob exclaimed.

“No, my friend, I didn’t. I’ve only offered money to someone to get it for me.” Hugenay corrected him.

“Ethan Easton,” Jupiter suspected.

“Exactly,” Hugenay confirmed.

“But why? What do you want with the painting?” Pete asked. “You can’t sell it, can you? The world knows it’s stolen.”

“Sure, but that does not matter to some people,” explained Hugenay. “There are people who are only interested in the artwork itself. That’s enough for them to want the artwork for themselves. And they’d pay a lot of money for it. One of these people gave me the job to get the Green Iron Woman.”

“Won’t you all sit down?” Hugenay suggested. “It’s easier talk then.”

“No, thank you, we’d better stand,” said Jupiter, suspecting a trap.

Hugenay then sat down on a chair by the open window. Seemingly without any intention, he looked down to the street. Traffic noise could be heard. He then quickly turned back to face the three, and said:

“To get back to your question—I had the painting taken, but then it had to be hidden first to allow a bit of grass to grow over it for a while and then get it out of the country. However, there were some difficulties. It would be too much to explain the details to you.

“Ethan Easton was afraid of being observed by the police, so he looked for a good hiding place for the painting. He could not leave it in the room he lives in because Miss Madigan is a terribly curious woman who snoops around.

“Then he found the perfect hiding place. He exchanged her print of the Green Iron Woman with the original, because nobody would suspect that a stolen painting simply hanging on the wall. But then you suddenly showed up. At first I thought you were on my trail, but then I noticed that the whole thing was nothing more than a stupid coincidence. But I didn’t want to take the risk that you might come across the painting by chance while searching for the amulet. So I called my aunt Lydia, and came up with this wonderful task for you.”

“Why didn’t Mr Easton just take the painting off again?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“Because he had already destroyed the print as he didn’t want Miss Madigan to discover the reproduction with him. Ethan Easton and I wanted to wait until we were sure the police weren’t after us. Then he would have taken the original, given it to me, and we both would have disappeared—never to be seen again.”

“Were you responsible for the water pipe burst at the Los Angeles County Museum?” Bob asked.

Hugenay smiled and nodded. “If you can’t get to the painting, you need to get the painting to come to you. That was what I had achieved when the exhibition was moved to Rocky Beach.”

“One more question,” Jupiter continued. “Why did your aunt say she’d take us off this case if we didn’t solve it by Monday? We could have turned back to the missing amulet.”

Hugenay smiled again. “You can, but you won’t want to! I remembered you three well. I know you won’t let the case go even when it seems hopeless.

“And on the one hand I had to keep you happy, on the other hand, I had to make sure that you wouldn’t get to me. That’s why I made it as difficult as possible for you. I knew that was the only thing that would get you excited enough to stay on the case and forget everything else. So I capitalized on your... shall we say... determination.

“Also, getting you off the case was just to create more intensity and urgency for the situation. Had you accepted leaving the case, she would have changed the story and asked for you to come back and continue.”

“And how did your aunt manage to make the cup fly?” Pete wanted to know.

Now Hugenay even laughed. “Very simple. She stood in the next room and watched you through the door until you stood with your back to her. Then she quickly took the cup and threw it at you, only to hide again afterwards. A while later, she entered the room and acted surprised.”

Jupiter hit his forehead with his flat hand. “The simplest tricks are the best,” he said. “Congratulations, but unfortunately the whole game didn’t help you. Bob, I think you can call the police now.”

“What are you going to tell the police? I didn’t commit the theft!” Hugenay said calmly.

“No, but you’re the mastermind. You just admitted that yourself,” Jupiter replied.

“Yes, but you have no proof of that,” said Hugenay.

“Wrong,” said Jupiter, triumphantly pulling a small device out of his jacket pocket. “A voice recorder,” he said. “We’ve recorded every word you’ve said. This will suffice as proof.”

Hugenay raised his eyebrows. “All due respect, Jupiter Jones.”

Bob went to the phone in the hotel room and called the police headquarters. He quickly told the officer what had happened and then hung up.

“Then I guess it’s my turn to surprise you,” Hugenay said. “I knew you’d come. Aunt Lydia knew that went back to looked at our family tree. She drew the right conclusions and informed me. So I was prepared for your visit. And that’s why I’m going to say goodbye now. It was nice meeting you guys again. Maybe it won’t be the last time.”

“I think so. Or are you planning to escape? You won’t succeed. There are three of us. You can’t get past us,” said Pete with a conviction, blocking the door.

“I don’t even have to get past you,” Hugenay said and got up from the chair. “*Au revoir!*” He suddenly made a lightning-fast turn and incredibly, he jumped out of the open window.

The Three Investigators ran towards the window and looked out.

Hugenay had not landed on the sidewalk, but on the awning that stood directly under the window. With a dexterity they hadn’t thought that man was capable of, he rolled off the fabric and landed onto the side walk. Then he ran to a waiting convertible with the engine running. At the wheel sat a man and Hugenay quickly climbed onto the passenger seat. He looked up and shouted to them, “The simplest tricks are the best!” He waved as the driver went full throttle, and the car shot off.

18. Aunt Elenor Sends Her Regards

“There you are at last,” Pete shouted and waved to Bob and Elizabeth. He was sitting at a round table with Jupe and Lys at the ice cream parlour where they wanted to celebrate the closure of their latest case.

When the two of them joined in, Pete asked: “Well, how was the exhibition?”

“Great!” Elizabeth said enthusiastically. “There were important people everywhere and we even got champagne. And the fact that the Green Iron Woman is back, it was a sensation.”

Bob was less enthusiastic. “It was a little too weird for my taste,” he said. “But it was nice to have experienced something like this.”

“Isn’t Kelly coming?” Elizabeth asked.

“Yes. She should be here any minute,” Pete replied. “She said she has news for us.”

“Me too, by the way,” Jupiter said. “Not a good one though. Reynolds just called me. They didn’t get Hugenay. Not yet, anyway. And they don’t think they’re gonna catch him either. He probably flew back to Europe on a fake passport. Well, he got away with it again—that’s the third time, for us.”

“What a bummer,” Pete buzzed.

“Why didn’t you follow him when he jumped out the window in front of you?” Lys asked, looking at Pete.

“I wanted to,” Pete said. “But the others held me back.”

“It wouldn’t have helped either,” Bob threw in. “The car went off so fast that we couldn’t see the licence plate. By the time we reached Pete’s car, he’s probably already at the airport.”

The ice-cream sundaes came and everyone jumped at them enthusiastically. Only Jupiter poked around the scoops listlessly.

“What’s the matter with you, Jupe?” Bob tapped the First Investigator on the shoulder. “On a diet again?”

“It just annoys me,” he said grumpily, “that we didn’t catch Hugenay.”

“Oh, don’t worry about it. After all, we got the Green Iron Woman back and Ethan Easton will be behind bars soon. What more do you want?”

“What about Lydia Cartier?” Lys wanted to know.

“What’s with her? She’s probably laughing up her sleeve because the police can’t pin anything on her. After all, she didn’t do anything wrong except to play a trick on us. Unfortunately that is not punishable,” Jupiter replied.

“Not yet,” Pete sneered. “But maybe the laws will be changed soon. Whoever plays evil tricks on The Three Investigators will be punished with imprisonment for not less than two years.”

They laughed. “Cheer up, Jupe! After all, you can’t help it,” Lys tried to comfort him. She put her hand on his shoulder and suddenly his mood improved. He decided not to spoil the evening for the others. And his appetite suddenly returned.

“What about Sigourney?” Elizabeth asked. “How did she get involved in this case?”

“She’s really a housekeeper and she worked for Lydia Cartier in the past three years,” Jupiter explained. “All along in this scheme, she just carried out her duties as an employee, although she was not at all comfortable about it. She was sent by Mrs Cartier to meet

Hugenay who told her exactly what to do, and to get the latest reports on our progress. In any case, she has decided to leave her job at Lydia Cartier's house."

"Hello!" came a voice from behind. It was Kelly and she sat next to Pete. She also ordered a large sundae.

"Well, what about your news?" Pete wanted to know.

"Yeah, well, that's the way it is," she began. "My great-aunt Elenor called me yesterday. She found her amulet."

"No!" Bob shouted. "Where? Where was it? We've searched practically everywhere!"

"Well, actually, she didn't find it directly," Kelly explained. "Rather, she remembered that she had put it in her safe deposit box so as not to lose it."

"Oh, my goodness! We looked with our eyes out of our heads and it wasn't even in her house," Bob moaned. "Best regards to your aunt!"

Kelly looked crushed. Then she turned to Pete. "I'm sorry I was so angry. I had no idea how justified it was for you to lose your patience."

"Ah... I've already forgotten about it," Pete replied generously and smiled.

"By the way, Aunt Elenor says hello. She wants to apologize to you and invite you three for coffee and cake as a compensation."

Jupiter rolled his eyes. "We'll have to think about that, though," he said.

"While we're at it," Pete began, "I think that in the future we'd better consider carefully whether to take a case or not. Therefore, we need to change our motto. And that's why I printed new business cards—for special cases... in case we ever run into an Aunt Elenor again..." He then reached into the back pocket of his jeans, pulled out a small pile of white cards and distributed them.

The cards began with the words: 'The Three Investigators', followed by 'We Investigate *Almost Anything*'.